The Jilting Effect: Antecedents, Mechanisms, and Consequences for Preference

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**ABSTRACT**

This research explores how the experience of a jilt—the anticipation and subsequent inaccessibility of a highly desirable, aspirant option—influences preference for incumbent and non-incumbent options. We conceptualize jilting as a multi-stage process, which consists of a pre-jilt anticipatory phase that is initiated upon the introduction of an aspirant option and a post-jilt phase that is initiated when the aspirant option becomes inaccessible. We show that during the anticipatory phase, a process of denigration specific to the incumbent option is engendered. The subsequent jilt elicits a negative emotional response. During the affectively-charged post-jilt phase, preference shifts away from the now-denigrated incumbent option, yielding a *jilting effect*. In four field and laboratory studies, we establish this jilting effect, rule out alternative accounts, and discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings.

Keywords: jilting effect, incumbent option, aspirant, dashed hopes, status quo, stock outs
Imagine the following situation: You are a cigar smoker. You are content with your current brand of Nicaraguan cigars, which you have smoked for a long time. Unexpectedly, you are told that much sought-after Cuban cigars are going to become available at your local cigar store. The embargo is being lifted on trade with Cuba and the storeowner indicates that he will set aside a box of Cubans for you to purchase in a month. You anticipate that the Cubans will be yours to purchase the next time you come to the shop, and until then, you will make do with your regular brand of Nicaraguan cigars. The following month, you arrive at the store in a state of anticipation. To your dismay, however, you learn that the embargo will remain in place indefinitely. The Cubans are not available for purchase—you are jilted! That is, you anticipated receiving a highly desirable “aspirant” option, only to have it become inaccessible. Standing crestfallen in the cigar store, you must decide whether you will stick with your familiar “incumbent” Nicaraguan cigars or switch to one of the other available options. Has the incumbent lost some of its luster, or do you cling to it? That is, in response to the jilt, will you continue to prefer your incumbent option or are you more likely to switch to an altogether different brand?

Product-related jilts happen frequently. Consider how marketing messages excite consumers with promises of access to new, highly desirable products only to have those products become inaccessible through stock-outs, launch delays, cancellations, and other breakdowns in product availability. Recent research suggests that in consumer settings, such jilting leads individuals to strive for the aspirant option more but to like it less (Litt, Khan, and Shiv 2010). However, prior research has neither closely investigated the necessary antecedents and consequent processes involved in jilting nor examined the implications of jilting for options other than the aspirant. In line with Litt et al. (2010) and for purposes of this research, we define
“jilting” as the anticipation of receiving a highly desired option—what we refer to as the aspirant option—followed by that option becoming inaccessible.

In the current work, we delve into the phenomenon of jilting, trace its antecedents and underlying mechanisms, and examine its consequences for choice options other than the aspirant. In doing so, our research advances the theoretical understanding of jilting in multiple ways. We reveal that the phenomenon of jilting involves a two-phase process; an anticipatory phase in which receipt of the highly desirable, aspirant option is anticipated, and a second post-jilt phase, which occurs after the aspirant option becomes inaccessible. We advance understanding of what constitutes an aspirant option and whether receipt of that aspirant must be both anticipated and its access subsequently blocked for a jilt to occur. Further, rather than focus upon preference for the once-desired aspirant option (e.g., the Cuban cigar), we instead identify preference implications of jilting for incumbent1 (e.g., the Nicaraguan cigar) and non-incumbent options. We address the question: After a jilt occurs, do consumers hold on to the incumbent option more tenaciously, or do they prefer it less? We also trace the mechanisms that underlie any shift in preference. Previewing briefly, we find that in response to a jilt, preference for the incumbent option is undermined. We refer to this shift in preference away from the incumbent option as the jilting effect.

From a managerial standpoint, an improved understanding of jilting is important given the aforementioned frequency of jilt-related marketing phenomena such as stock-outs (Che, Chen, and Chen 2012; Fitzsimons 2000; Jing and Lewis 2011; Swait and Erdem 2002; Su and

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1 The term “incumbent brand” has been defined as the brand individuals have used most frequently in the past, prior to a new alternative becoming available (Murray and Häubl 2007). Similarly, the “status quo” refers to a previously chosen brand (Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988). Finally, incumbency is related to the term “leader,” which has been applied to a brand which is tentatively preferred over other options in a predecisional choice set when there are no prior preferences upon which to rely (Carlson, Meloy and Russo 2006). We use the term “incumbent option” to denote the preferred, leading, familiar, chosen, and status quo option.
Zhang 2009), lack of distribution or channel access (Bergen, Dutta, and Shugan 1996; Miyazaki, Rodriguez, and Langenderfer 2009), and launch delays of preannounced products (Wu, Balasubramanian, and Mahajan 2004). Despite the ubiquity of such occurrences, prior research of these phenomena has not focused upon the antecedents or processes involved in jilting, nor the implications of jilting for incumbent option preference. For marketing managers, incumbent option preference is particularly relevant because attempts to shift consumer preferences away from an incumbent through competitive offerings are often met with resistance (Polites and Karahanna 2012). That is, consumers typically prefer the incumbent over otherwise comparable alternatives (e.g., status quo bias) (Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988; Wang, Keller, and Siegrist 2011). This represents a unique challenge for marketers of products that are not overwhelmingly superior to entrenched incumbents. By better understanding consumers’ responses to jilting, firms will be better able to identify jilt-related circumstances that are likely to shift people away from an incumbent option. Specifically, jilting, even though often unintentionally initiated by a firm or circumstances beyond the firm’s control, may undermine adherence to the incumbent brand. For a competitor, however, jilting situations may represent an opportunity to steal share away from the incumbent brand.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Jilting Process

Jilting occurs when an individual anticipates receiving an aspirant option that subsequently becomes inaccessible. As previewed briefly earlier, the phenomenon of jilting is inherently a two-phase process: An anticipatory phase in which consumers hold an incumbent
option but anticipate receiving an aspirant option, and a second phase, which occurs after the aspirant option becomes inaccessible (see figure 1 for an organizing framework).

---insert figure 1 about here---

In typical choice situations, individuals tend to disproportionately choose the incumbent option, even when deliberately attempting to make even-handed assessments between it and a new alternative (Johnson and Goldstein 2003; Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988). In fact, there is concern that preference for the incumbent is so strong that it leads individuals to make suboptimal choices (Brenner, Rottenstreich, Sood, and Bilgin 2007; Schweitzer 1994). However, we propose that the experience of a jilt will have predictable implications for incumbent option processing and preference. Specifically, we explore how both cognitive and affective forces shape preference for the incumbent and non-incumbent options during the two phases associated with jilting.

**Anticipatory phase.** The initial phase of jilting begins when an individual perceives that s/he has viable future access to a highly desirable, aspirant alternative to the incumbent. Future access to the highly desirable aspirant initiates a period of anticipation as consumers contemplate the benefits of obtaining the aspirant and experience heightened positive affect characterized by anticipation (e.g., excitement, hopefulness; Winterich and Haws 2011) directed toward that aspirant. We argue that without this anticipation of a viable and desirable replacement for the incumbent option, jilting will not occur. That is, we contend that mere knowledge of the existence of the aspirant is insufficient to initiate the jilting process; anticipation both enables a shift in cognitions about the incumbent—whose replacement by the aspirant is pending—and sets up the negative emotional reaction sparked by the aspirant becoming inaccessible. Returning to our opening scenario, although you may know that Cuban cigars exist and you desire those
cigars, it is not until you anticipate acquiring the Cuban cigar that the jilting process begins to unfold.

During the anticipatory phase, what happens to the incumbent option? To answer this question, we turn to the literatures on status quo and familiarity effects, and on pre-decisional processing. Much of the literature on status quo options suggests that consumers’ preferences are sticky (in favor of the incumbent)—staying with the incumbent option reduces the costs, uncertainty, and anticipated regret that would result from switching to the unknown, even when the new option is objectively superior to the incumbent (Kahneman and Tversky 1982; Luce 1998; Murray and Häubl 2007; Polites and Karahanna 2012; Zauberman 2003). Such mechanisms support a tendency to mentally shield or even bolster the familiar incumbent option to promote psychological comfort (Kay, Jimenez, and Jost 2002).

In contrast, the literature associated with pre-decisional processing suggests that when consumers anticipate receiving an aspirant option, the mechanisms that shield and bolster the incumbent should be attenuated. Specifically, when the aspirant is introduced, a comparative process is naturally triggered, with the incumbent serving as the referent against which the aspirant is compared (Dhar and Simonson 1992; Hamilton, Hong, and Chernev 2007; Mantel and Kardes 1999; Sanbonmatsu, Posavac, Kardes, and Mantel 1998; Tversky 1977). Other available options, that were previously judged to be less attractive than the incumbent, should be less focal in these comparative processes to streamline processing effort (Wright 1975). That is, the comparative process that emerges during the anticipatory period will focus primarily on the incumbent and the aspirant.

During the comparative process, individuals typically engage in biased processing (Brownstein 2003), wherein the option that is more preferred is supported, and the option that is
less preferred is denigrated, with the degree of denigration being a function of the relative
difference in attractiveness of the options being compared (Blanchard, Carlson, and Meloy
2014). Thus, when the aspirant is introduced and triggers the anticipatory period, the incumbent's
protected status is likely to be compromised.

Thus, as per our conceptualization, two necessary conditions are required for pre-jilt
incumbent denigration to take place. One is for there to be anticipation (which will only occur if
future access to the aspirant is viable) and the other is for the aspirant to be desirable, such that it
dominates the incumbent option.

Post-jilt phase. When access to the anticipated, aspirant option is blocked due to either
circumstance or intent, Litt et al. (2010; p. 118) suggest that the resulting negative affect from
the jilt will cause individuals to turn away from choices and options associated with the negative
affect (Ratner and Herbst 2005). Though not the focus of this research, the aspirant option is
now “tainted” by association with this negative affect, resulting in consumers liking the now
unattainable aspirant option less.

Turning attention to the incumbent option, we propose that when the aspirant becomes
inaccessible, a preference shift away from the incumbent will ensue. The reasons for this are
two-fold. First, once the incumbent has been denigrated, consumers are likely to actively
interpret any subsequent information to cohere with their assessment of the now-denigrated
incumbent (Blanchard et al. 2014; Meloy 2000; Russo, Carlson, Meloy, and Yong 2008). Thus, it
may be difficult for the incumbent to recover to its former, favored status (Carlson et al. 2006;
Chernev 2004; Schweitzer 1994). Second, the negative emotion that results from the jilt itself
should facilitate a preference shift away from the now-denigrated incumbent, both through
appraisal tendencies and facilitating the impact of denigration. To elaborate, we propose that
when the jilt occurs (i.e., the aspirant becomes inaccessible), consumers will experience negative affect. This negative affect will be characterized by sadness due to both the perceived loss of the aspirant and the loss of the incumbent in its prior state (i.e., the incumbent has been denigrated). This negative affect has several important implications for subsequent preference. Foremost, emotional appraisal tendencies associated with sadness increase loss-replacement behaviors to the point of risk-taking (Raghunathan and Pham 1999; Raghunathan, Pham and Corfman 2006). As such, sadness should encourage consumers to turn from the now-denigrated incumbent and toward alternatives that could offset perceived losses. Furthermore, prior research has identified that sadness facilitates systematic processing of information (vs. heuristic; Tiedens and Linton 2001). Consistent with this, Garg, Inman, and Mittal (2005) indicate that sadness engenders a less heuristic assessment of choice options. As applied to our research, following the jilt, sadness should lead to a less heuristic assessment of the now-denigrated incumbent versus other options, serving to weaken rather than bolster preference for that incumbent post-jilt. That is, jilt-induced sadness will itself decrease incumbent preference, and should also facilitate the impact of incumbent denigration upon post-jilt preference. Therefore, the emotional experience of the jilt itself will precipitate the ultimate preference shift away from the denigrated incumbent.

We note that other discrete negative emotions may also emerge as a result of jilting, including anger. Yen and Chuang (2008) proposed that anger, as a certainty-based emotion, should increase adherence to incumbent options, but did not empirically test this possibility. We do not propose that anger is fundamental to the jilting effect, but do empirically attempt to isolate the role of sadness versus anger in leading to the effect.

Altogether, we predict that preference for the incumbent will be lower after a jilt, relative to when no jilting has occurred and that this will emerge due to incumbent denigration and post-
jilt sadness. We note that this preference shift away from the incumbent will occur only when the aspirant becomes inaccessible and not when receiving the aspirant option is still pending. That is, a necessary condition for the jilting effect is the inaccessibility of the once-anticipated aspirant.

Overview of Studies

In a series of four studies, we identify and demonstrate predictable circumstances under which jilting leads consumers to shift preference away from an incumbent option. The studies also delve into the mechanisms for this effect. Study 1 establishes the basic effect of jilting on the incumbent option in a real choice study and shows that jilting undermines preference for the incumbent option. Studies 2 – 4 subsequently examine the antecedents and effects of jilting on incumbent and non-incumbent options during the disparate phases of the process. Specifically, Study 2 tests one necessary condition for the jilting effect to occur, namely anticipating receiving (but not awareness or mere consideration of) an aspirant option. Study 2 also provides preliminary evidence for the underlying denigration process related to the incumbent. To further examine the role of denigration when the incumbent is self-generated (rather than established through an endowment), Study 3 examines the degree to which information about the incumbent option is distorted during the anticipatory and the post-jilt phases. Finally, Study 4 tests two other necessary conditions for the jilting effect to occur, namely aspirant option desirability and blocking of the aspirant option. It also examines the role of affective responses induced by the jilt in facilitating the preference shift away from the incumbent. Together, the results provide evidence related to the robustness of the jilting effect and the mechanisms through which this effect emerges.
STUDY 1 – ESTABLISHING THE BASIC EFFECT

Study 1 was conducted to establish that the experience of jilting leads to an observable decrease in preference for the incumbent option in an everyday setting with actual product choice. To do so, we instantiated the incumbent option by adopting an experimental paradigm employed in research on the mere-ownership effect (Beggan 1992; Peck and Shu 2009; Sen and Johnson 1997). Specifically, participants examined a bottle of wine that was then set aside for later pick up. We subsequently manipulated the experience of jilting and examined whether the jilt led consumers to stick with the incumbent, or switch to a comparable alternative as their final choice.

Bottles of chardonnay were used as stimuli in this study. This category was chosen because it was possible to examine preferences among attractive yet unfamiliar brands, and to realistically offer an aspirant option (to create anticipation) as well as a third alternative that was comparable to the incumbent (following the jilt).

Method

Participants and design. Forty-three staff members (84% female) at a large Northeastern university were recruited to participate in a “wine evaluation study.” The study employed a 2 (Jilt: Yes vs. No) x 2 (Incumbent Brand: A [Stone Cellars] vs. B [Tisdale]) between-subjects design. The research was conducted over the course of a single day.

Procedure. Participants were recruited by researchers during the morning hours and asked to engage in a very brief wine evaluation task. To establish an incumbent option, each participant privately handled and examined a physical bottle of wine with the promise of receiving that bottle at the end of the day (adapted from Sen and Johnson 1997). The bottle of wine each participant examined was one of two brands of California chardonnay, each valued at
$15, counterbalanced between the jilt conditions; 21 participants examined a bottle of Stone Cellars, and 22 a bottle of Tisdale.

During initial exposure to the wine, participants answered several questions (e.g., “Do you recognize this brand?”) and were told that the bottle of wine they had just examined was theirs to keep. They were also informed that due to a university alcohol policy, the researchers would keep their bottle of wine until the end of the day. Participants provided their email addresses to receive information about the end-of-day pickup location.

At lunchtime, all participants received an email that contained not only the pick-up location, but also informed roughly half of the participants (i.e., those in the Jilt condition) that a limited number of bottles of a fine French chardonnay, valued at $50, would be given away while supplies lasted. In the No-Jilt control condition, participants were informed that bottles of an alternative $15 bottle of wine, comparable to the incumbent, were also available. Thirty-eight of the initial 43 individuals participated in the wine pickup. (Based on interviews with those who failed to complete the study, attrition was due to staff members leaving work for the day prior to the start of the pick-up time frame.)

Participants entered the pick-up room individually. Upon entering, participants in the Jilt condition were told that the $50 fine French wine bottles had unfortunately all been given away. They were then given the choice between the incumbent option and a newly introduced third alternative that was comparable to the incumbent. Those in the No-Jilt condition simply chose between the incumbent and this same new alternative when they arrived at the pick-up location. The new alternative was described to participants in the Jilt and No Jilt conditions as a bottle of chardonnay, comparable to the bottle they had examined earlier in the day (i.e., Stone Cellars for those with Tisdale as the incumbent, and Tisdale for those with Stone Cellars as the incumbent).
After making their choice, participants rated the attractiveness of both the Stone Cellars and Tisdale wines on a scale from Not at all Attractive (1) to Extremely Attractive (9), and answered a series of questions as potential covariates. These included brand recognition, the anticipated taste of the wine, the attractiveness of the bottle and label, and a proxy for executive resource depletion by asking, “How busy was your day?” (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice 1998). We included depletion as a covariate because individuals exhausted from a busy day might have been more inclined to minimize choice effort (Baumeister et al. 1998) and thus been more likely to stay with the incumbent bottle of wine.

Results and Discussion

As expected, participants were unfamiliar with both brands of chardonnay. The majority of participants did not recognize either Stone Cellars (92%) or Tisdale (87%) brands (difference NS; $\chi^2 < 1$), thus minimizing the possibility that prior beliefs about the two options affected their wine choice. Further, a binary logistic regression revealed that the brand name of the incumbent (Stone Cellars vs. Tisdale) did not affect preference for the incumbent ($\chi^2 < 1$). As such, the results are collapsed across incumbent brand for all subsequent analyses.

Preference for the incumbent. As expected, the vast majority of participants in the No-Jilt condition chose the incumbent option (88.24%). This result is compatible with decades of research on the robustness of preference for incumbent options—in the absence of jilting, the incumbent brand retained its advantage.

In contrast, participants experiencing a jilt chose the incumbent option significantly less often (57.14%) and instead selected the comparable new alternative that was introduced after the aspirant French bottle of wine became inaccessible. A binary logistic regression upon choice of
the incumbent option indicated that this difference was due to a significant effect of jilting ($\chi^2 = 3.92, p < .05$). This result supports our proposition that choice of the incumbent decreases in response to jilting.

We next examined the overall wine attractiveness ratings across conditions. In keeping with the choice data, jilting significantly decreased the rated attractiveness of the incumbent option ($M_{\text{NoJilt}} = 7.24; M_{\text{Jilt}} = 6.09; F(1,36) = 5.72, p < .05$), but had no effect upon the rated attractiveness of the comparable third wine option ($M_{\text{NoJilt}} = 6.48; M_{\text{Jilt}} = 6.18; F < 1$). Control variables (e.g., resource depletion), included one-by-one in separate models, did not alter the overall pattern of results. As such, these variables were excluded from this and further analyses.

**Mediation analysis.** To determine whether a shift in the rated attractiveness of the incumbent option influenced whether participants selected the incumbent versus the comparable third alternative, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The model examined the influence of jilting upon binary choice of the incumbent with two mediators in parallel: 1) the rated attractiveness of the incumbent, and 2) the rated attractiveness of the comparable third alternative. The results indicated a significant indirect effect of jilting through the rated attractiveness of the incumbent option upon choice (indirect effect = -2.34; 95% CI [-11.65, -.06]), but no indirect effect upon choice through the rated attractiveness of the alternative to the incumbent option (indirect effect = 1.03; 95% CI [-3.63, 7.44]). The direct effect of jilting became marginal while controlling for these indirect effects ($\beta = 2.07; Z = 1.74, p = .083$). In other words, the decrease in choice share of the incumbent option was driven by a decrease in the incumbent option’s rated attractiveness and not by changes in the perceived attractiveness of the comparable third alternative. These results are consistent with our proposition that jilting results
in denigration of the incumbent option and this, in turn, decreases preference for it; evaluations of the new comparable third alternative were unaffected.

Thus, Study 1 provides evidence for the power of jilting to decrease preference for the incumbent option with actual product choice. It also provides preliminary evidence of the underlying denigration process. One issue related to our conceptualization that Study 1 does not address is the role that anticipation of receiving the aspirant option plays in driving the jilting effect. An alternative and trivial account vis-à-vis our conceptualization is that mere consideration and comparison of the incumbent with any superior alternative during the anticipatory period would result in the preference shift for the incumbent that was observed in Study 1. We address these issues in Study 2.

*STUDY 2 – THE ROLE OF ANTICIPATION*

In Study 2, we replicate the core findings documented in Study 1 and focus on the role that anticipation (of receiving the aspirant option) plays in driving the jilting effect. Specifically, in this study, we examine whether anticipation of receiving the aspirant option, rather than merely considering a desirable option, is required for the effects of jilting to emerge. In doing so, we provide a deeper understanding of the jilting effect by demonstrating that anticipation triggers a denigration process that influences post-jilt preference for the incumbent.

*Method*

*Participants and design.* The study employed a 3-group, between-subjects design (Anticipation, No-Anticipation, and Control). As in Study 1, in the Anticipation condition, participants were aware of as well as anticipated receiving the aspirant option. Consistent with
our conceptualization, we predicted that anticipation of the aspirant (characterized by reactions of heightened positive affect, e.g., excitement and hopefulness) would emerge when the highly desirable aspirant was perceived as viably accessible at some future point. In the No-Anticipation condition, participants were aware of the highly desirable aspirant option, but they did not anticipate receiving it (i.e., it was available only through separate sale). Instead, they were told that an alternative that was comparable to the incumbent would also be available as their gift. Those in the Control condition were not made aware of the highly desirable aspirant option in any way, but again were told that an alternative that was comparable to the incumbent would also be available. Participants were 129 undergraduate students (37% female; median age = 19) at a large Northeastern university who received course extra credit for their participation.

Procedure. As in Study 1, wine was selected as the choice context for this study. To instantiate the incumbent, participants read a scenario that indicated they had received a $15 bottle of Tisdale Chardonnay as a gift for participating in a market test and that the wine could be picked up after one week. Participants then viewed an image of the wine they were being given and provided overall product evaluations of this incumbent option on a scale from “Extremely Bad” (1) to “Extremely Good” (7).

Participants were told to imagine that they later received an email containing information about a second bottle of wine, which could be substituted for the Tisdale upon pickup. The substitute was described as a very fine $50 bottle of wine (Anticipation condition), a comparable $15 bottle of wine with information about a very fine $50 bottle of wine available for separate sale (No-Anticipation condition), or a comparable $15 bottle of wine (Control condition). The exact text of this manipulation is available in Web Appendix A.
Participants indicated their reactions to the newly introduced alternative (i.e., hopeful, excited) on a “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7) scale to verify that our manipulation of the aspirant option was appropriate. Participants also indicated the valence of their cognitions (e.g., positive, negative) directed at the incumbent option during this same period on 7-point scales (see Web Appendix A). Participants in the Anticipation and No-Anticipation conditions responded to an open-ended question regarding their thoughts about the incumbent (Tisdale) and aspirant (fine French) wines. This comparative thought exercise ensured that the aspirant wine received due consideration in the No-Anticipation condition, enabling us to rule out mere consideration and comparison of the incumbent to any superior alternative as the underlying process.

Participants were next told to imagine that after several days, they returned to the store for the scheduled pickup. Those in the Anticipation condition were told that the $50 bottles of fine wine had already been given away, and were presented with a comparable $15 alternative to the incumbent. Those in the No-Anticipation and Control conditions were presented with the $15 alternative. Participants indicated their selection (i.e., incumbent versus comparable alternative) and provided choice likelihood ratings for the incumbent and the comparable alternative on scales from “Definitely would not choose” (1) to “Definitely would choose” (7). Finally, participants answered a series of background questions for potential use as control variables (e.g., gender, age) and responded to a hypothesis guess check (“Please use the space below to tell us what you think this study has been about”). No responses to the open-ended question about the study’s purpose correctly identified one or more study hypotheses.

Results
**Manipulation checks.** As predicted, upon hearing of the possible wine substitution in the anticipatory period, respondents in the Anticipation condition reported greater excitement ($M_{\text{Anticipation}} = 5.33$, $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.44$, $M_{\text{No-Anticipation}} = 4.42$; $F(2,125) = 5.08$, $p < .01$) and hopefulness ($M_{\text{Anticipation}} = 5.12$, $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.26$, $M_{\text{No-Anticipation}} = 4.26$; $F(2,125) = 5.66$, $p < .01$) relative to the Control and No-Anticipation conditions. This pattern of response is consistent with feelings of anticipation being elevated in the Anticipation condition.

**Choice of the incumbent.** A binary logistic regression examining choice share of the incumbent option revealed a significant effect of condition ($\chi^2 = 7.76$, $p < .05$). Choice share of the incumbent in the Anticipation condition (64.29%) was significantly lower than the No-Anticipation (83.72%; $\chi^2 = 4.02$, $p < .05$) and Control conditions (88.37%; $\chi^2 = 6.29$, $p = .01$). That is, consistent with our conceptualization of the jilting effect, individuals anticipating receipt of a highly desirable (i.e., aspirant) option were less likely to stay with the incumbent option when the jilt occurred. Such a shift in preference did not occur when consumers were aware of an aspirant option but did not anticipate its receipt (i.e., the No-Anticipation condition). Inclusion of measured control variables did not alter this pattern of results, and as such, these variables are excluded from this and subsequent analysis.

**Choice likelihood ratings.** To verify the choice share results above, we next examined the seven-point choice likelihood ratings for the incumbent and comparable alternative (the latter reverse scored; $r = .84$). The results of an ANOVA revealed the predicted pattern of results ($F(2,125) = 2.97$, $p = .055$) as did planned contrasts. Those in the Anticipation condition indicated they were significantly less likely to choose the incumbent ($M = 4.62$) than those in the Control ($M = 5.28$, $F(1,125) = 5.04$, $p < .05$) and No-Anticipation conditions ($M = 5.15$, $F(1,125) = 3.82$, $p = .05$).
The choice and choice likelihood rating results thus far suggest that anticipating receiving an aspirant option (a $50 bottle of fine wine) was a key driver of the jilting effect. Simply knowing that a $50 bottle of fine wine was available for purchase was not sufficient to create the jilting effect. That said, it seems possible that those in the No-Anticipation condition had simply failed to give that $50 bottle of wine due consideration. In order to rule out this alternative account of our findings, we turn to the open-ended responses. If the fine wine was considered to the same degree across the Anticipation and No-Anticipation conditions, our conceptualization of jilting would be correct and this would also help rule out mere awareness and consideration of an attractive, but unanticipated option for the jilting effect observed.

Thought generation. We coded the thoughts participants generated in response to the open-ended query: “What are you thinking about regarding the bottle of Tisdale versus the fine French wine?” in the Anticipation and No-Anticipation conditions. If the open-ended response contained a positive thought, attitude or evaluation of the fine French wine, a “positive thoughts” variable was coded as 1 (otherwise 0). Similarly, negative thoughts about the fine French wine, and positive and negative thoughts about the Tisdale incumbent were coded using this approach. The results revealed a high and similar frequency of explicitly positive thoughts about the fine French wine in both the Anticipation and No-Anticipation conditions (Anticipation = 18/42, No-Anticipation = 15/43; $\chi^2 = .567, p > .40$), while negative thoughts about the fine wine were quite infrequent and similar across conditions (Anticipation = 0/42, No-Anticipation = 2/43; $\chi^2 = .00, p > .90$). Thus, the fine wine was given similar consideration and positively evaluated regardless of whether its receipt was anticipated or not. Consistent with our conceptualization of the jilting effect, however, negative thoughts about the incumbent option were more frequent in the Anticipation than the No-Anticipation conditions (Anticipation = 13/42, No-Anticipation = 5/43;
\( \chi^2 = 4.45, p < .05 \), and positive thoughts about the incumbent less frequent (Anticipation = 2/42, No-Anticipation = 8/43; \( \chi^2 = 3.40, p = .065 \)). These results are consistent with our conceptualization that denigration of the incumbent occurs when individuals anticipate receiving a highly desirable, aspirant option, rather than mere exposure to, knowledge of, or consideration of this alternative.

**Denigration of the incumbent.** To fully explicate the role of denigration during the anticipatory period in supporting the jilting effect, we next examined participants’ positive and negative incumbent-related cognitions (on the 1-7 scale; Web Appendix A) and tested the influence of these cognitions on subsequent preference. We first created a composite score, a two-item composite of negative cognitions and positive cognitions, the latter reverse scored (r = .77) as a function of condition, where a higher value corresponds to more negative thoughts about the incumbent.

As expected, during the anticipatory period, participants expressed more negative cognitions related to the incumbent in the Anticipation (\( M = 4.58 \)) versus Control (\( M = 3.44 \)) and No-Anticipation (\( M = 3.89 \)) conditions (\( F(2,125 = 11.69), p < .01 \)). A bootstrapping analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008) was conducted with Anticipation (vs. Control) as the independent variable, cognitions related to the incumbent as the mediator, and choice likelihood as the dependent variable. As expected, a significant indirect effect emerged (Indirect effect = -.62; 95% CI [-1.14, -.23]). Jilting led to negative cognitions about the incumbent during the

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2 To supplement this analysis, we also constructed an index of the initial valence of thoughts adapted from the procedures of Johnson, Häubl, and Keinan (2007) to assess the salience of positive versus negative thoughts about the incumbent and fine French wine options. Specifically, for each option, a value of 1 was assigned if the first listed thought was positive, -1 assigned if negative, and 0 assigned if the thought did not carry valence. For the fine French option, ANOVA of this index revealed that primary thoughts were positive and similar, regardless of anticipation (\( M_{\text{Anticipation}} = .43, M_{\text{No-Anticipation}} = .30; F(1, 83) = 1.20, p > .20 \)). In contrast, primary thoughts in the Anticipation condition were negative about the incumbent, and significantly more so than in the No-Anticipation condition (\( M_{\text{Anticipation}} = -.26, M_{\text{No-Anticipation}} = .07; F(1, 83) = 7.79, p < .01 \)). These results are also consistent with our conceptualization and demonstrate the role of anticipation in facilitating incumbent denigration.
anticipatory phase, which in turn reduced the likelihood of choosing the incumbent post-jilt. A similar model for Anticipation (vs. No-Anticipation) emerged, with jilting leading to more negative cognitions related to the incumbent, which led to a reduction in the choice likelihood ratings for the incumbent (Indirect effect = -.43; 95% CI [-.83, -.15]). These results are consistent with our proposition that anticipation of receiving an aspirant option triggers denigration of the incumbent option, which undermines post-jilt preference for that option.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 support our conceptualization of the jilting effect. Anticipating receiving an aspirant is essential for the subsequent effects of jilting to emerge. We observed that the introduction and thoughtful consideration of a highly desirable alternative alone was insufficient to precipitate the jilting effect. In addition, Study 2 reveals that incumbent denigration during the anticipatory period decreased preference for the incumbent following the jilt by the aspirant option. That is, anticipation of receiving the aspirant triggers a process of incumbent option denigration that subsequently undermines preference for the incumbent after the jilt.

The results of Study 2 indicate that the denigration process which begins in the anticipatory phase influences post-jilt preference. An unanswered question is whether the denigration process that starts in the anticipatory phase continues into the post-jilt phase. In Study 3, we use a novel process-tracing methodology to examine how information about the incumbent is processed during both the anticipatory and post-jilt phases of a decision, thereby permitting examination of the denigration process as it unfolds for incumbent and non-incumbent options. Furthermore, in the studies so far, we have instantiated an incumbent option by giving participants a real bottle of wine (Study 1) and through hypothetical ownership of a bottle of
wine as a reward (Study 2). In both of these studies, participants were endowed with an incumbent option. The incumbent option was not self-generated. A key question that we address in the next study is whether incumbent denigration will emerge when consumers self-generate an incumbent option based on a developing preference for one option over another in a binary tradeoff.

**STUDY 3 – TRACING DENIGATION OF A SELF-GENERATED INCUMBENT**

Study 3 was conducted to further delve into the denigration mechanism which is an important component of the jilting effect. Doing so serves several objectives. First, in the previous studies, participants were endowed with an incumbent option—it was presented to them as their preferred option. In Study 3, the incumbent is self-generated by the participants. This could influence how reticent consumers are to denigrate the incumbent in the presence of the aspirant. Second, we expand our inquiry to consider the presence of multiple options in a consideration set during the anticipatory phase. This methodology allows us to examine whether the denigration process is more strongly associated with the incumbent relative to other, non-incumbent choice options that pre-date introduction of the aspirant. By tracing individuals’ information processing, it also allows us to pinpoint the onset of the denigration process. Namely, do consumers denigrate the incumbent option during both the anticipatory period as well as during the post-jilt phase (after access to the aspirant option has been blocked), or do they only denigrate the incumbent during the anticipatory phase when the aspirant option is still pending? Furthermore, we explore whether the incumbent can recover its special status when the only options remaining post-jilt are those that were available prior to the anticipatory phase.
As a tertiary objective, we also explore the role of aspirant desirability in initiating the incumbent denigration process. Studies 1 and 2 induced the jilt through manipulating the presence or absence of a highly desirable alternative (i.e., an aspirant) to the incumbent. Might the introduction of any alternative to the incumbent, regardless of its desirability, be sufficient for jilting? Consistent with our theory, we propose that only introduction of an aspirant alternative to the incumbent will initiate the jilting process.

To examine the issue of denigration onset and end, we break the process trace into three unique segments (rather than a simple pre-post jilt dichotomy) and examine information processing of the incumbent and non-incumbent options across each. The three segments include: 1) an incumbent emergence phase that precedes introduction of the aspirant option during which the incumbent option is generated by the individual, 2) an anticipatory phase wherein an alternative to the incumbent is pending, and 3) a post-jilt phase that occurs after this alternative becomes inaccessible. This design allows us to precisely identify the timing of the onset and the time-course of the denigration process.

To trace information processing across the three segments, we employed a novel method introduced by Blanchard et al. (2014) that builds on the literature on pre-decisional distortion (Russo, Meloy, and Medvec 1998). Specifically, this method captures both positive and negative distortion of information for all options in a choice set. Positive distortion of information signals that an attribute is interpreted in an overly positive manner (relative to an unbiased control condition), while negative distortion reveals an interpretation of information that is overly negative about that option.

In line with Blanchard et al. (2014), we allowed the incumbent option to emerge naturally based on attribute information related to two options that was provided in the incumbent
emergence phase and prior to the introduction of the aspirant option. This organic formation of an incumbent option based on pre-decisional information (Sen and Johnson 1997) allows us to assess how the incumbent is viewed in the subsequent anticipatory and post-jilt phases.

Method

Participants and design. Two hundred and nine undergraduate students (51% female, median age = 19) from a large university in the Northeast participated in the study for course extra credit. Of these, 142 were assigned to one of two experimental conditions and 67 were assigned to a control condition. Individuals in the experimental conditions were told that they would be evaluating two restaurant options and making a choice between them. Partway through the choice task, a new alternative was introduced. The two-cell design manipulated the desirability of this new alternative (Aspirant vs. Non-Aspirant). The introduction of the new alternative ended the incumbent-emergence phase.

Participants in the control condition provided unbiased estimates of the true diagnosticity (i.e., undistorted evaluations) of the attribute information for each alternative (i.e., the attribute information was not specific to one alternative or the other but evaluated independently) (see Blanchard et al. 2014). The attribute evaluations of these individuals (i.e., in the control condition) were used to calibrate the magnitude of distortion for or against the incumbent and non-incumbent options in the two experimental conditions.

Procedure. Participants started by reading that they had won a radio contest and their task was to select one of two restaurants for a fine-dining meal. The two comparable restaurants were described by nine attributes, presented sequentially. After each attribute, participants rated how appealing each option was based on the attribute information just presented on a nine-point
scale (i.e., not at all appealing (1) to extremely appealing (9)), and rank ordered the two restaurant options in order of overall desirability. Four attributes (i.e., menu, prices, ambiance, and service) described the two restaurants and were presented to all experimental participants. (See Web Appendix B for stimuli.) The option ranked in first place based on desirability after the fourth attribute became the de facto incumbent, and the option ranked in second place after the fourth attribute became the non-incumbent. We traced how processing for the self-identified incumbent (and non-incumbent) was effected in subsequent phases of the choice process.

After the fourth attribute, participants were interrupted and informed that a third restaurant option, Restaurant K, was available. This commenced the anticipatory phase. Restaurant K was introduced as either an Aspirant or Non-Aspirant option. Participants then provided their expectations of their experience at Restaurant K and rated the attractiveness of Restaurant K on a scale from 1 (Not at All Attractive) to 7 (Very Attractive) as a manipulation check.

To permit us to understand the denigration process during the anticipatory phase, experimental participants then continued to evaluate the two original restaurants on two additional attributes (i.e., dining guide ratings and desserts) using the same procedures as the previous four attributes. The distortion of information (positive and negative) for the incumbent option after the introduction of Restaurant K, and for the non-incumbent option on these attributes allowed us to determine whether anticipation of a highly desirable (versus average) Restaurant K option would lead to denigration of both the incumbent and non-incumbent options during this anticipatory period.

Finally, after evaluating these two anticipatory phase attributes, all participants were told that the radio station regretted to inform them that the newly introduced Restaurant K option was
no longer available. No reason was provided. This initiated the post-jilt phase. Participants then continued to evaluate the two original options in the choice set on a series of three additional attributes (i.e., parking, wine selection, and hours of operation). After the ninth attribute was reviewed, background demographics and hypothesis guessing information was gathered.

Results

Manipulation check. As expected, an ANOVA indicated that the Aspirant option was viewed as significantly more attractive than the Non-Aspirant option ($M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 6.27, M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 3.14; F(1,140) = 238.23, p < .001$), consistent with our manipulation of desirability. Further, no respondent correctly identified the study hypotheses.

Distortion. A mixed model examining average incumbent distortion by phase (i.e., incumbent-emergence, anticipatory, and post-jilt) as the within subjects factor and the Desirability of Restaurant K (i.e., Aspirant vs. Non-Aspirant) as the between subjects factor indicated a marginal main effect of jilting ($F(1,140) = 3.39, p = .067$), and no main effect of phase ($p = .59$), both subsumed by a significant two-way interaction ($F(1,140) = 4.64, p < .05$). The nature of this two-way interaction is illustrated in figure 2.

During the incumbent-emergence phase (i.e., prior to the introduction of the Aspirant/Non-Aspirant alternative), as expected, distortion favoring the incumbent was positive and significantly greater than 0 in both the Aspirant ($M_{\text{Aspirant}} = .34; t(67) = 2.79, p < .01$) and Non-Aspirant ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = .35; t(73) = 3.02, p < .01$) conditions. Furthermore, the difference in pro-incumbent distortion between the two conditions was not significant ($p > .90$). Thus, prior to
the introduction of Restaurant K, an incumbent was self-generated, with positive distortion in favor of the incumbent in both conditions.

During the subsequent anticipatory phase (i.e., following the introduction of Restaurant K but prior to its access being blocked), those individuals presented with a Non-Aspirant option continued to interpret information about the incumbent favorably, as evidenced by continued positive, non-zero distortion for the incumbent ($M_{Non-Aspirant} = .43; t(73) = 3.34, p < .01$). In contrast, those individuals considering a highly desirable aspirant demonstrated a significant decline in distortion, such that it disappeared entirely ($M_{Aspirant} = .01; t(67) = .06, p > .90$). That is, introduction of an aspirant option led to less favorable evaluations of information about the incumbent ($M_{Aspirant} = .01, M_{Non-Aspirant} = .43; t(140) = 2.27, p < .05$). This verifies that even when the incumbent is one that the consumer has identified and supported, the denigration process of the incumbent begins in the anticipatory phase.

Examining the denigration process during the post-jilt phase (i.e., following removal of Restaurant K), when the option was Non-Aspirant (i.e., a jilt had not occurred), incumbent distortion continued to be positive ($M_{Non-Aspirant} = .50; t(73) = 3.49, p < .01$). That is, those individuals not jilted continued to evaluate the incumbent favorably. Again in contrast, when Restaurant K was an Aspirant (i.e., a jilt occurred), distortion remained low and not significantly different than 0 during this phase ($M_{Aspirant} = .09; t(67) = .60, p > .50$). That is, following a jilt by an aspirant option, the incumbent was not favorably evaluated ($M_{Non-Aspirant} = .50, M_{Aspirant} = .09; t(140) = 1.97, p = .05$). The incumbent did not “recover” after the jilt.

Finally, we examined whether distortion of information about the non-incumbent option (i.e., the option ranked in the second position at the end of the incumbent-emergence phase) differed during the anticipatory phase. That is, did evaluations of the non-incumbent option also
suffer from denigration when the introduction of a highly desirable aspirant option occurred? Results revealed that regardless of whether Restaurant K was an Aspirant or Non-Aspirant option, processing of information about the non-incumbent option was not favorable (M_{Non-Aspirant} = -.06, M_{Aspirant} = -.22; t(140) = .86, p > .30). That is, in contrast to the incumbent option, an increased denigration process did not emerge for the non-incumbent option.

Discussion

Study 3 highlights that the denigration process that occurs when an aspirant option is introduced emerges even when the incumbent option is naturally self-generated. It is not unique to incumbency established through endowment. Consistent with our conceptualization of the jilting effect, we found that favorable evaluations of the incumbent were undermined during the anticipatory phase and remained so during the post-jilt phase. Our results also support our proposition that anticipation of an aspirant option initiates denigration of the incumbent option and not other, non-incumbent options in a choice set. Furthermore, we establish that a newly introduced alternative must be highly desirable (i.e., aspirant) to initiate the denigration process.

The studies thus far have established the jilting effect and revealed that anticipation of an aspirant initiates a process of denigration that is specific to the incumbent. This incumbent denigration subsequently influences preference after the aspirant becomes inaccessible. Although Study 2 established that anticipating receipt of an aspirant is a necessary condition for jilting, and Study 3 found evidence that the alternative that is introduced needs to be highly desirable to trigger the denigration process during the anticipatory phase, it is less clear 1) whether blocked access to the anticipated alternative is a key component of the jilting effect, and 2) whether the
negative emotions generated by this blocked access (e.g., sadness) play a critical role in triggering the jilting effect.

Our conceptualization suggests that the alternative to the incumbent needs to be highly desirable for the denigration of the incumbent to occur during the anticipatory period. Though Study 3 provided preliminary evidence as to the importance of the desirability of the alternative in triggering the denigration process, we nonetheless manipulate the desirability of the alternative in Study 4 to verify that the jilting effect is limited to a true aspirant. In addition, we also ask: If denigration has already tainted the incumbent, is blocking access to the anticipated alternative necessary for the jilting effect to emerge? We propose that when an aspirant becomes inaccessible, the associated affective response (i.e., sadness) facilitates the preference shift away from the incumbent option. That is, denigration alone does not drive the jilting process; the emotional experience of the jilt itself is critical to the ultimate preference shift away from the denigrated incumbent. These propositions are tested in Study 4.

STUDY 4 – OTHER NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR THE JILTING EFFECT

The primary goals of Study 4 were to further refine the necessary conditions for the jilting effect to emerge, while delving deeper into the underlying process and the role of negative affect as a driver of the jilting effect. Study 4 was thus designed to examine the independent roles of the desirability of the aspirant (versus a less desirable, non-aspirant alternative) and the necessity of the withdrawal of that option. To test these elements of our conceptualization, we manipulated the desirability of the introduced alternative (an aspirant versus a non-aspirant) to the incumbent and whether access to this alternative was indefinitely blocked or receipt was still...
pending. Consistent with our conceptualization, the jilting effect should emerge when access to an aspirant option is indefinitely blocked and not pending.

In this study, we also look more closely at how the emotional experience of the jilt itself (characterized by sadness and perhaps anger) influences preference. We propose that denigration alone is not the sole mechanism responsible for the jilting effect; our conceptualization proposes that withdrawal of the aspirant, an experience charged with negative affect, also plays an important role. That is, denigration is necessary, but alone not sufficient to induce the observed decrease in incumbent option preference post-jilt. Jilt-induced sadness is particularly relevant to the shift in incumbent preference. Consistent with a loss appraisal tendency, sadness increases loss-replacing and risk-taking behaviors (Raghunathan and Pham 1999), both consistent with decreased incumbent preference. Furthermore, sadness reduces heuristic processing, which facilitates a more critical assessment of choice options (Garg et al. 2005). Thus, we expect that the heightened sadness due to jilting serves as a catalyst to shift preference away from the now-denigrated incumbent. Anger, in contrast, tends to increase the desire for greater certainty in decision-making (Garg et al. 2005; Yen and Chuang 2008). Therefore, although we test its role in this study, anger has less clear implications for incumbent preference.

To rigorously test the roles of desirability and withdrawal of the aspirant for the jilting effect to emerge, we again split the jilting process into phases. We examine preference for the incumbent prior to and after the realization that access to the aspirant is blocked. In doing so, we test whether preference for the incumbent shifts before versus after access is blocked.

Boxes of cigars were used as stimuli in this study. We chose this category because it provides a realistic incumbent (i.e., Nicaraguan cigars), and an aspirant alternative (i.e., Cuban cigars) as well as non-aspirant, comparable alternatives (i.e., Honduran and Jamaican cigars).
These options were selected based upon a pretest (described below). Further, the category provides a realistic method to examine jilting in the marketing context of delayed shipments, expanding our examination of jilting beyond the context of traditional stock-outs (Studies 1-2).

Pretest. Prior to running Study 4, we conducted a separate pretest, drawn from the same population of cigar smokers as the main study, to identify which cigars would be considered comparable options and which would be considered aspirant. Sixty-nine Mechanical Turk (mTurk) participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of various types of cigars on a scale from “Not at all” (1) to “Extremely” (7). The results revealed that Cuban cigars were significantly more attractive than Nicaraguan cigars ($M_{\text{Cuban}} = 6.19, M_{\text{Nicaraguan}} = 4.24; t(68) = 10.68, p < .001$), whereas Jamaican and Honduran cigars were viewed as comparable alternatives to Nicaraguan cigars ($M_{\text{Jamaican}} = 4.15, M_{\text{Honduran}} = 4.32, M_{\text{Nicaraguan}} = 4.24; p's > .50$). This made Cubans the obvious choice for the aspirant cigar, and Nicaraguan, Jamaican, and Honduran cigars as comparably desirable, non-aspirant options.

Method

Participants and Design. The study employed a 2 (Desirability of alternative: Non-Aspirant vs. Aspirant) x 2 (Access to alternative: Pending vs. Blocked) between-subjects design, with the latter conditions together representing a jilt (i.e., blocked access to an aspirant alternative). Participants were 235 members of an online mTurk panel of English speakers located in the United States (73% male, median age 30 years) who agreed to participate in a study for cigar smokers. They received $.50 for their voluntary participation.

Procedure. Participants were told to imagine that every month, they visit their local cigar shop to pick up a box of their regular Nicaraguan cigars (see Web Appendix C for exact text).
This month, the clerk indicated that the embargo on trade with Cuba would be lifting soon, although access to the cigars would remain quite rare. All participants were then told that several days later an email from the clerk arrived stating that he would set aside a box of alternative cigars to purchase next month. This started the anticipatory period. In the high desirability, aspirant conditions, participants were told that Cuban cigars would be available to purchase next month. In the low desirability, non-aspirant conditions, participants were told that Jamaican cigars (i.e., comparable to the Nicaraguans) would be available.

During the anticipatory phase, participants indicated how hopeful and excited they were about receiving their box of [Cuban][Jamaican] cigars. This served as a manipulation check as to the desirability of the anticipated option. Participants also indicated the valence of their thoughts about the incumbent (as in Study 2). After providing these ratings on seven-point scales, participants returned to the shop. Those in the access “Blocked” condition were informed that the target option was no longer available due to embargoed shipments, thereby enabling the post-jilt phase to commence. Participants in the access “Pending” condition were told that the shipment was scheduled to arrive by the next store visit, thereby maintaining the anticipatory phase. A series of emotional responses were then recorded, including experienced sadness and anger (e.g., “Imagine how you would feel right now… “I would feel sad”, “I would feel angry”), on 1-to-7 scales from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). Participants then selected between the incumbent (Nicaraguan cigars) and a new, comparable option (Honduran cigars). Like Study 2, participants also provided two choice likelihood ratings, one for the incumbent and one for the comparable option, on a scale from “Definitely would not choose” (1) to “Definitely would choose” (7). The study ended with participants answering demographic questions (e.g., gender,
age), and an open-ended question to identify hypothesis guessing. No responses to the open-ended question about the study’s purpose correctly identified one or more study hypotheses.

Results

Manipulation check. As predicted, respondents in the Aspirant (vs. Non-aspirant) conditions reported greater excitement ($M_{Aspirant} = 5.45$, $M_{Non-Aspirant} = 3.63$; $F(1,231) = 93.65, p < .01$) and hopefulness ($M_{Aspirant} = 6.00$, $M_{Non-Aspirant} = 3.36$; $F(1,231) = 183.64, p < .01$). Neither the manipulation of Access (Pending vs. Blocked) nor the two-way interaction influenced this anticipatory phase measure ($F$s $< 1.5$).

Preference for the incumbent. A binary logistic regression examining choice-share of the incumbent option revealed a significant two-way interaction between Desirability and Access ($\chi^2 = 4.53, p < .05$; see figure 2). Neither of the main-effects was significant ($\chi^2 < 1$). To interpret this interaction, Desirability of the alternative (Aspirant vs. Non-Aspirant) was examined at the each level of Access (Blocked vs. Pending). In the Blocked condition, the effect of Desirability on incumbent preference was significant (Non-Aspirant = 84.75%; Aspirant = 64.15%; $Z = 2.45, p = .01$). That is, consistent with our conceptualization of jilting and with the results of Studies 1 and 2, individuals who were jilted by having a highly desirable aspirant option introduced and then withdrawn (i.e., blocked due to a trade embargo) revealed a lower preference for the incumbent option. In contrast, when the choice was made in the Pending condition (i.e., the anticipatory phase was continuing), no effect of Desirability emerged upon preference for the incumbent (Non-Aspirant = 79.37%; Aspirant = 83.33%; $Z = -.56, p > .50$).

--insert figure 3 about here--

Analysis of the two 7-point choice likelihood ratings of choosing the incumbent (reverse scored the anticipated option rating and averaged; $r = .79$), demonstrated the same pattern of
findings. ANOVA results yielded a significant interaction between Desirability and Access \((F(1,231) = 6.13, p = .01; \text{main effects not significant, both } ps > .10)\). A planned contrast indicated that when the anticipated alternative was Blocked, an Aspirant option decreased the choice likelihood rating for the incumbent \((M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 5.44 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 4.76; F(1,231) = 7.31, p < .01)\). No effect of Desirability emerged when the aspirant was Pending (i.e., continuation of the anticipatory phase) \((M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 5.25 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 5.43; F(1,231) = .57, p > .40)\). Consistent with our conceptualization of the jilting effect, individuals who experienced a jilt (i.e., had been promised a highly desirable aspirant option whose access was later blocked) demonstrated decreased preference for the incumbent.

**Roles of denigration and jilt-induced emotion.** The results of Study 4 thus far indicate that the preference shift is driven by the experience of the jilt itself (i.e., blocked access to an aspirant), rather than mere introduction of an aspirant. To determine what role the affect-laden jilt had in shifting preference, we first tested whether the pattern of denigration was consistent with prior studies. Incumbent option denigration in the pre-jilt stage (measured before the Access manipulation), as measured by negative incumbent-related cognitions, were significantly greater when a highly desirable aspirant was anticipated \((M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 3.05 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 4.25; F(1,231) = 35.26, p < .01; \text{no effect of Access } [p > .60] \text{ or the interaction } [p > .20])\). To test whether denigration influenced post-jilt preference (consistent with prior studies), we conducted a moderated-mediation analysis (Hayes 2012: Process model 58), with Access (Blocked vs. Pending) as the moderator, Desirability (Aspirant vs. Non-Aspirant) as the independent variable, denigration as the mediator, and incumbent choice likelihood as the dependent variable. Results indicated a significant indirect effect through denigration when Access was Blocked (indirect effect = -.38; 95% CI [-.83 to -.03]), but not when Access was Pending (indirect effect = .03;
That is, the indirect effect of denigration decreased preference following the jilt (consistent with previous studies), but was mitigated when receipt of the aspirant was still pending. This result indicates that pre-jilt denigration alone is not sufficient to fully account for the jilting effect, and thus the jilt experience itself is critical to moderating the preference shift.

What role does the affective reaction to the jilt play in driving post-jilt preference? According to our theory, the jilt is an affectively-charged experience that entails a negative emotional response characterized by sadness (consistent with a loss appraisal) and potentially anger. In keeping with prior research, the experience of sadness should increase the likelihood of engaging in high risk, high reward activities to replace what has been lost (Ragunathan and Pham 1998), while also increasing systematic (vs. heuristic) processing of choice options (Garg et al. 2005). Both tendencies should facilitate decreased preference for the now-denigrated incumbent.

Post-jilt affect measures (taken after the Access manipulation) were as expected. ANOVA results for sadness indicated a significant two-way interaction between Desirability and Access ($F(1,231) = 44.25, p < .01$) such that sadness was significantly higher when Access to an Aspirant (vs. Non-Aspirant) was Blocked ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 2.76$ vs. $M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 5.02; F(1,231) = 59.78, p < .01$). No such difference in experienced sadness emerged when Access was Pending ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 2.49$ vs. $M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 2.07; F(1,231) = 2.34, p > .10$). A similar interaction pattern emerged for anger ($F(1,231) = 33.59, p < .01$) such that anger was higher when Aspirant Access was Blocked ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 2.61$ vs. $M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 4.51; F(1,231) = 39.90, p < .01$), and similar when Access was Pending ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 2.51$ vs. $M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 2.00; F(1,231) = 3.14, p = .08$).

To assess the importance of jilt-related sadness and anger, we conducted a moderated-mediation analysis (Hayes 2012: Process model 58), with Access (Blocked vs. Pending) as the moderator, Desirability (Aspirant vs. Non-Aspirant) as the independent variable, sadness and
anger as parallel mediators, and incumbent choice likelihood as the dependent variable. Results indicated a significant indirect effect through sadness when Access was Blocked (indirect effect = -.47; 95% CI [-.87 to -.16]), but not when access was Pending (indirect effect = -.04; 95% CI [-.22 to .02]). No indirect effect through anger emerged (both 95% CIs contained 0). That is, sadness was greater when access to a highly desirable aspirant was blocked, and this emotion undermined preference for the incumbent. These results are consistent with our theory and indicate that denigration influences the shift in preference, but is not the sole mechanism – the jilt experience itself entails sadness that serves as a catalyst for switching away from the incumbent. Thus, although the denigration process begins in the anticipatory period, the jilt itself (i.e., blocked access to the desirable aspirant) is an emotionally charged experience characterized by sadness, and this sadness facilitates the preference shift away from the incumbent.3

Discussion

The results of Study 4 support our conceptualization of the jilting effect and delineate the necessary conditions for this effect to emerge. Specifically, the results reveal that withdrawal (i.e., in this case blocked access through a trade embargo) of a desirable option are both necessary to drive decreased preference for the incumbent. Preference for the incumbent remained unaffected when the jilting involved a non-aspirant option, or when access to the aspirant was pending.

3 A follow-up analysis was conducted to directly assess whether pre-jilt denigration also impacted preference through contributing to experienced sadness. To test this relationship between anticipatory incumbent denigration and post-jilt sadness, a serial mediation model (Hayes 2012: Process model 6) was run with Desirability as the independent variable, incumbent-related cognitions as the first mediator, sadness as the second mediator, and incumbent choice likelihood as the dependent variable. Separate models were run for each level of Access (Blocked vs. Pending). When access was Blocked, a significant indirect effect was revealed (Indirect effect = -.13, 95% CI [-.45 to -.01]). However, when access was Pending, no significant indirect effect emerged (Indirect effect = -.003, 95% CI [-.05 to .02]). These results demonstrate that the impact of denigration influences preference, in part, through the experience of sadness elicited by the jilt.
Taken together with Studies 2 and 3, the results of Study 4 suggest that when consumers are introduced to an alternative that is both desirable and whose access is pending, they enter an anticipatory phase marked by a denigration of the incumbent. It is not until the aspirant option becomes inaccessible, however, that preference for the incumbent option is undermined. When the aspirant is still pending, the incumbent maintains its preferred status relative to other comparable options. These findings further establish the unique antecedents and effects of jilting on incumbent option preference.

Further, Study 4 also sheds light on the mechanisms of the jilting effect. Specifically, the impact of denigration of the incumbent is most impactful upon choice following the affectively-charged jilt. Furthermore, sadness experienced as part of the jilt itself facilitates the preference shift away from the denigrated incumbent. Experienced anger did not similarly influence the jilting effect. We note that in a follow-up study, reported in Web Appendix D, we replicated this finding using a different context (restaurant selection) and sample (undergraduate students).

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The present research delves deeply into the jilting phenomenon and its impact on preference for incumbent and non-incumbent options. In doing so, we reveal the necessary antecedents of the two-phase jilting process, its underlying mechanisms, and implications for incumbent preference. Four studies reveal that the experience of jilting is a two-stage process that systematically influences consumer preference for incumbent options. A preliminary anticipatory phase begins when consumers anticipate obtaining an aspirant option, which must be both highly desirable and potentially accessible at some future point. During this phase, consumers start to denigrate the incumbent option. Negative cognitions about the incumbent
option increase, and favorable processing of information about the incumbent is undermined during this anticipatory phase. Though the denigration process begins during this anticipatory phase, the incumbent option maintains preferred status versus alternatives comparable to it. Jilting occurs when access to the anticipated aspirant option is blocked. Negative emotions (in particular sadness) are elicited as part of this experience, facilitating the preference shift away from the denigrated incumbent option during this post-jilt phase.

**Theoretical Contributions**

The present work makes a number of contributions to the literature. First, we expand the scope of the literature examining jilting (e.g., Litt et al. 2010) by considering the impact of jilting upon options that were available prior to introduction of the highly desirable, aspirant option. In doing so, we find that jilting has the effect of decreasing preference for incumbent options. Second, our results identify the mechanisms that lead to this change in preference. An ongoing process of denigration directed at the incumbent option is initiated during the anticipatory phase and continues after the jilt occurs, leaving the incumbent tainted. The affectively charged jilt leaves consumers open to shifting preference away from the now-denigrated incumbent. Alternative accounts for the jilting effect and the underlying mechanisms are addressed.

Third, our research expands knowledge concerning marketing actions that commonly induce jilts. For example, research examining stock outs has typically focused upon subsequent consumer preference and buying behavior for the blocked option (Che et al. 2012; Fitzsimons 2000; Jing and Lewis 2011; Swait and Erdem 2002). Similarly, research examining consumer denial of a product due to limited channel access or delay of a preannounced product has focused upon implications for the blocked option (Miyazak et al. 2009; Wu et al. 2004). Our work
expands the scope of this research to consider how consumers respond not only to a blocked aspirant option, but also how their preferences shift for incumbent options after the jilting event. Fourth, in expanding our understanding of how consumers respond to marketing actions that elicit jilting, this research has direct implications for the decision-making practices of brand and product marketing managers (detailed below).

Fifth, our work also has implications for research on incumbency-related biases. A rich body of research has repeatedly demonstrated that individuals have a heightened preference for familiar incumbents, with work ranging from mere exposure to mere possession to endowment effects (Bornstein and D’Agostino 1992; Brenner et al. 2007; Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991; Litt, Reich, Maymin, and Shiv 2011; Peck and Shu 2009; Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988; Sen and Johnson 1997). Such incumbency biases are remarkably robust and common both inside and outside of the lab. We contribute to this body of research by shedding light on how preference for incumbents can be reduced (Brenner et al. 2007; Chernev 2004; Murray and Häubl 2011; Yen and Chuang 2008).

Finally, though others have examined related constructs such as cognitive dissonance reduction and regret when options fail to live up to expectations, the current jilting framework does not rely on the same mechanisms. In the present work, we trace the temporal path of jilting and show that it is the denigration that begins during the anticipatory phase and sadness arising from the jilt experience that facilitates the change in preference in such cases.

Our research on the jilting effect is distinct from extant work on phantom options (i.e., options initially presented as available but later made unavailable; Hedgcock, Rao, and Chen 2009). That research has focused largely upon eliciting attraction effects (Huber and Puto 1983) in subsequent preference among remaining available options. Research into the attraction effect
has yielded inconsistent results when the withdrawn option is substantially more desirable than other options within the set (i.e., consistent with an aspirant option), and when pre-existing preferences for the remaining options are strong (i.e., consistent with an incumbent option; Huber, Payne, and Puto 2014). We note that our present work is distinct from traditional paradigms examining phantom options which have not examined (i) the effects of blocked access to an aspirant option that is highly desirable, (ii) preference for an incumbent option that pre-dates the choice set, (iii) preference for options not in prior choice sets, and (iv) the cognitive and affective processes underlying the jilting effect.

Though the present work expands our understanding of the jilting process and highlights the unique impacts of jilting on shifts in preference toward incumbent options, we also believe that this research has many managerial implications and sets the stage for multiple future inquiries. We now turn to the managerial implications of the research.

Managerial Implications

Our research findings are relevant for brand managers, product marketing managers, and retailers involved in product launches and product availability in competitive market environments. Marketers regularly promote highly desirable, aspirant products to consumers in the hopes of increasing purchase intentions. However, consumers anticipating such products may become jilted due to stock-outs, lack of channel access, product launch delays, or other breakdowns in consumer accessibility. Such jilts provide opportunities for competitors to steal market share, and serve as a source of exposure for the jilting firm or brand. For example, what are the implications for a current customer who intended to upgrade within a brand, but was jilted? Our results, coupled with those of Litt et al. (2010), suggest that individuals will be both less satisfied with their incumbent option as well as the denied upgrade. This presents a situation
ripe for customer defection to competitors. Implications for in-brand repeat purchases warrant particular consideration. Our results suggest that brand managers should work closely with retailers to ensure that shelf availability and promotional activities (e.g., limited quantity sale pricing, intense demand-generation advertising campaigns) are sufficient to meet demand, particularly during new product launches.

Conversely, situations in which a competitor delays a high-profile product launch, experiences availability issues, or otherwise jilts consumers may provide a competitive opportunity. Such jilted consumers are more likely to move away from their incumbent. Our work suggests that firms should invest in identifying such opportunities, then strike while the iron is hot with sales promotions directed toward consumers who have experienced a jilt.

Future Research Directions

Our research has obvious implications for future research examining jilting. In our present work, we used highly attractive aspirant options that dominated the incumbent option on multiple dimensions. It is possible that an alternative that dominates the incumbent, even on a single dimension, may be sufficient to start the denigration process against the incumbent option rolling. By giving consumers the opportunity to directly compare the aspirant and the incumbent option, it shines a light on where the denigration and distortion process can gain traction (Carlson et al. 2006). Related to this is research that further considers attributes for which the aspirant trails the incumbent (i.e., asymmetry), such as the cost implications of acquiring the aspirant. In our current experiments, the aspirant is clearly superior to the incumbent, but does not necessarily come at a greater cost—which could dampen the level of experienced anticipation. The implications of asymmetrical attribute comparison between an aspirant and incumbent is
particularly important given its likely prevalence in marketing contexts (i.e., obviously superior products often cost more). This is a matter for future investigation.

Future research may also examine the interplay between the effects of jilting on preference for the incumbent option (as demonstrated in our present research), and the impact of jilting on attitudes toward the aspirant option (as demonstrated by Litt et al. 2010). Litt et al. (2010) demonstrated that following a jilt, the withdrawn, aspirant option carries affectively-charged taint. Could such taint spread to options that share surface similarities with the aspirant, perhaps through a process of affective transfer (Martin and Stewart 2001)? If this is the case, such tainted alternatives may not serve as suitable substitutes for the denigrated incumbent. It would be worthwhile to examine expanded choice sets that include not only the incumbent option, but also other options that systematically vary in the degree to which they bear surface similarity to the tainted aspirant. Similarly, future research should consider whether the jilting effect transfers across categories to effect other incumbent options, particularly when incumbents in those separate categories share surface characteristics (e.g., a brand name). Furthermore, future research may examine more closely the implications of jilt-induced affect, distinct from denigration or taint, upon preference. The results of study 4 indicate that sadness plays a key role in facilitating preference away from the incumbent—however, the extent to which this sadness is merely incidental affect experienced as a result of the jilt (a state which is temporary) versus emotional taint (an enduring association attached to the incumbent) remains as aspect of the underlying process that warrants further inquiry. As part of this inquiry, it would be valuable to isolate the primary drivers of sadness—loss of the aspirant versus becoming “stuck” with the now-denigrated aspirant.
As conceptualized and studied in the present work, jilting does not require intent to reject on the part of a third party. That is, the jilt may occur due to a stock out (e.g., all of the bottles of wine are gone as in Studies 1—2) or due to decisions made by the brand, company, or a government agency (Studies 3—4). However, could explicit intent to jilt impact the present pattern of results? Though intentionally jilting consumers would not be in any marketers best interest, in a follow-up to Study 4, we manipulated intent to jilt on the part of the retailer (i.e., “The clerk tells you that the Cuban cigars did arrive, but that the shop owner decided to keep all of the Cuban cigars for himself.”). The pattern of preference shift for the incumbent was similar to the lower intentionality (embargo) condition. Thus, although these preliminary results suggest that intentionality does not significantly alter the impact of jilting on preference for the incumbent, future research may explore conditions under which intentionality impacts preference for the denied aspirant option or the incumbent options.

Final Thoughts

A fundamental question addressed by this research deals with the implications of jilting for consumer well-being. The introduction of a highly desirable option may actually steal your pre-existing happiness with your current situation, and fail to return it after a jilt occurs. In such a case, would you have been better off if the highly desirable option had never been introduced? The potential distress experienced as a result of the jilt may ultimately outweigh the benefits (if any exist) associated with abandoning the familiar incumbent. The answers to questions of consumer welfare and happiness are not readily apparent. We hope that future research will continue to explore the implications of jilting for marketers and consumers.
REFERENCES


**FIGURE 1: TWO-PHASE JILTING PROCESS**

Aspirant Option Introduced

Aspirant Option Becomes Inaccessible

Anticipatory Phase (Incumbent Denigration Process Begins)

Post-Jilt Phase (Affective Response, Preference Shifts)

**FIGURE 2: TRACING INCUMBENT OPTION DISTORTION (STUDY 3)**

Note: Vertical bars depict standard errors

**FIGURE 3: INCUMBENT PREFERENCE AS A FUNCTION OF DESIRABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVE (STUDY 4)**
Pending Access to Alternative
Non-Aspirant Alternative: 79.37%
Aspirant Alternative: 83.33%

Blocked Access to Alternative
Non-Aspirant Alternative: 84.75%
Aspirant Alternative: 64.15%
WEB APPENDIX A

Study 2 scenario introduction and manipulation:
Imagine that you are taking your weekly trip to a local shopping mall, and pass by a table outside of a nice kitchenware and wine shop. The people at the table are running a final market test for a new brand of wine that the store will introduce next week. The wine is Tisdale, a Chardonnay from California that will retail for around $15 per bottle.

You are asked to participate in the market test. You will evaluate the external appearance of the bottle of Tisdale wine, and in return you will receive that bottle of Tisdale wine for free. The bottle of wine can be picked up from that store next week. You agree to participate. The wine you agreed to evaluate and will receive a bottle of is pictured below.

You finish evaluating the bottle of Tisdale and provide your email address. You also receive a voucher that indicates you own a $15 bottle of Tisdale Chardonnay that can be picked up from this store in one week.

Later in the week, you receive an email thanking you for participating in the study and reminding you to pick up your bottle of wine at the store next week.

Control condition: The email also tells you that bottles of a comparable Chardonnay wine, valued at $15, will be available when you pick up your bottle. You have the option to take home one of these bottles instead of your bottle of Tisdale Chardonnay.

Anticipation condition: The email also tells you that several bottles of a very fine and expensive French Chardonnay wine, valued at $50 per bottle, will be available on a first-come-first-served basis when you pick up your bottle! You have the option to take home one of these bottles of fine French wine instead of your bottle of Tisdale Chardonnay!

No-Anticipation condition: The email also tells you that bottles of a comparable Chardonnay wine valued at $15 will be available when you pick up your bottle. You have the option to take home one of these comparable bottles instead of your bottle of Tisdale Chardonnay. The email also says that several bottles of a very fine and expensive French Chardonnay wine, priced at $50 per bottle, will be available for separate sale (your voucher cannot be redeemed for this French wine).
Multiple item measures:

Reaction to alternative: Thinking about the optional bottle of [comparable/fine French] wine, how strongly do you agree with the following statements: I feel [hopeful][excited] Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7)

Incumbent cognitions: I would be thinking about the [positives][negatives] of my bottle of Tisdale Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7))
WEB APPENDIX B

Study 3: Restaurant Attributes Across the Predecisional Phases

INCUMBENT EMERGENCE PHASE:

Menu: Restaurant G has a limited regular dinner menu of poultry, seafood, beef and pork, but an extensive list of dinner specials which frequently include meats such as venison and duck. There are always multiple vegetarian entrees on the list of dinner specials as well. Restaurant Z offers a full complement of fish, poultry, beef and pork dishes, served daily. Evening specials always include pasta and two or more vegetarian dishes. Special requests are readily accommodated on regular menu items.

Prices: Restaurant G says that on average, non-alcoholic beverages are $2-$4, dinners are $18-$31 and include a salad, and desserts are $5-$7. At Restaurant Z, dinners include a non-alcoholic beverage, salad, main course, and dessert, and range in price from $23-$45.

Ambiance: Restaurant G has a main dining area with a mixture of large and small tables. In the smaller adjacent dining area, a fireplace dominates the room. Soft lighting comes from dimmable, electrified candles located in wall sconces in the main dining room. In the smaller dining room, the fireplace, when lit, provides a rosy glow. It can get a little toasty though for those sitting close to it. Restaurant Z is comprised of multiple dining areas, with tables suited to the decor of the room. Candles in hurricane sconces adorn each table. At the larger tables, multiple candles softly illuminate the table. In the largest dining area, a chandelier hangs from the ceiling. A dining nook is available and has small tables with high-back chairs. Because the chairs are so large, it can be challenging to sit forward for intimate conversation. That said, the nook is the perfect atmosphere for relaxing.

Service: The wait staff at Restaurant G are friendly and professional. Patrons are able to make special requests from the staff and they are always accommodating. The wait staff at Restaurant Z are competent and cheerful. They go out of their way to make your meal enjoyable.

ANTICIPATORY PHASE BEGINS:

Now imagine that while you are evaluating your options, the radio station where you won the contest lets you know that there is a new restaurant option available. For the purpose of this study, the new restaurant will be called Restaurant K.

Aspirant: Restaurant K, offering French cuisine, is generally considered the best fine-dining restaurant in town! The regional Dining Guide gives Restaurant K top scores across the board. You have heard from multiple sources that this restaurant is excellent. For your tastes, the menu and ambiance of this restaurant far outclass your
previous options. For the rest of this study, imagine that all of the characteristics of Restaurant K are those of your ideal restaurant.

Non-Aspirant: Restaurant K, offering French cuisine, is generally considered to be average compared to other fine-dining restaurants in town. The regional Dining Guide gives Restaurant K only average scores. You have heard from multiple sources that this restaurant is just OK. For your tastes, the menu and ambiance may not be quite up to your previous options. For the rest of this study, imagine that all of the characteristics of Restaurant K do not match those of your ideal restaurant.

Anticipatory Phase Evaluation Continues:

You will ultimately choose between restaurants K, G, and Z. In the meantime, you should continue to evaluate Restaurants G and Z, while imagining what K would also be like.

Dining Guide Ratings: A reputable website called The Dining Guide rates all of the restaurants in your area. The ratings for your options are as follows: On a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 is poor and 7 is excellent, Restaurant G is given a rating of 5 in food quality, 5 on service quality, a 5 on ambience, and a 3 on wine selection. The Dining Guide gives Restaurant Z a 5 on food quality, 4 on service, and a 6 on ambience. The book mentions that Restaurant Z had just received its liquor license at the time the book went to press.

Desserts: Restaurant G has a variety of desserts served all the time, including cakes, pies, fruit and ice cream. In addition, a single specialty dessert is prepared daily (e.g., chocolate mousse).

Restaurant Z has a smaller assortment of standard desserts (including cake and pie), but a variety of daily specialties typically features cheesecake, a chocolate dessert, and a fruit sorbet.

JILT PHASE BEGINS:

The next day you receive a message from the radio station. They would like you to call them. You call them to let them know your decision. Before you can tell them your choice, however, they tell you that due to circumstances beyond the station's control, Restaurant K is no longer an option.

Post-Jilt Attributes:

Parking: You learn that Restaurant G is located in a residential area. As a result, on-street parking in the vicinity is limited. There is no parking garage close by. However, valet service is available for free on a first-come first-served basis. For Restaurant Z, you learn that valet service is not available, but a large parking garage is located just down the street from the restaurant. The parking is free in the evening, but you have to make sure you are out before the garage closes at 10 PM.
**Hours of Operation:** You find out that **Restaurant G** serves lunch between 11:00 AM and 1:30 PM. Dinner is served between 5:00 PM and 10:00 PM. **Restaurant Z** serves lunch between 11:30 AM and 2:00 PM. Dinner hours are between 4:30 PM and 9:30 PM.

**Wine:** **Restaurant G**'s wine list includes a global selection of wines from California and Western Europe. There are notable red and white wines, although the list is stronger on whites. Some of the wines are available by the glass. The wine selection at **Restaurant Z** is said to be 'very good'. Australian and Chilean wines are among the top sellers, although champagne and other sparkling wines are also available. House wines are available by the glass.

Repeating measures after each attribute:

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<tr>
<th>Restaurant</th>
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<td>Restaurant G</td>
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**Think about all of the information you have received so far on all of the dimensions.** If you were to think about this decision process as a race and the restaurants as runners in the race, how would the restaurants compare.

First, which one is in the lead? Give it a ranking of #1 in the box indicated. Now, think about how the other restaurants currently stack up against the leader. Give your next most preferred option, based on all of the information seen so far, a ranking of #2, and so on for each of the restaurants. (You can use the “tab” button on the keyboard to move between boxes.)

☐ Restaurant G

☐ Restaurant Z

For calculating distortion, please see:

[http://faculty.georgetown.edu/sjb247/tutorials/distortion/](http://faculty.georgetown.edu/sjb247/tutorials/distortion/)
WEB APPENDIX C

Study 4 Scenario Introduction and Manipulation:

You visit your local cigar shop around the same time once a month. You go into the cigar shop on your monthly trip looking for a box of cigars. You pick up your regular box of Nicaraguan cigars, which you also bought the month before. You strike up a conversation with the store clerk. The clerk mentions that the long-standing embargo on Cuban cigars has lifted, and the first shipments should be entering the US soon. You and the clerk both know that Cubans are in extremely high demand, and will be almost impossible to find in the United States for the next year.

Later, you receive an email from the store thanking you for your business. The clerk also tells you that [Non-Aspirant condition: boxes of Jamaican cigars will be in stock soon. These cigars are comparable to your Nicaraguan cigars, and cost about the same.][Aspirant condition: a limited number of boxes of fine Cuban cigars will be arriving soon, and he offers to hold a box for you. These cigars are far superior to your Nicaraguan cigars and almost impossible to find, but cost about the same.]

Blocked condition: You arrive at the shop and enter. The clerk tells you that the [Jamaican / Cuban] cigars did not arrive, and will not arrive for anyone this year. [Jamaica / Cuba] has decided to withhold cigar shipments until the U.S. agrees to import more [Jamaican / Cuban] citrus and coffee products.]

Pending condition: You arrive at the shop and enter. The clerk tells you that the [Jamaican/Cuban] cigars are still scheduled to arrive next month.

Measures of reaction to alternative: Regarding the box of [Jamaican/Cuban] cigars, how strongly do you agree with the following statements: I feel [hopeful][excited] Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7)
WEB APPENDIX D

Follow-up to Study 4: Process Roles of Sadness & Anger

A follow-up to Study 4 was conducted with the objective of replicating the discrete mediating roles of sadness and anger when a jilt occurs.

Participants and Design. The study employed a 2 group (Desirability of alternative: Non-Aspirant vs. Aspirant) between-subjects design, with the latter condition representing a jilt. Eighty-five undergraduate students (55% male, median age 19 years) at a large Northeastern University participated in return for extra course credit.

Procedure. Participants read a scenario in which they had an upcoming dinner with their significant other, and had made reservations at a fine dining restaurant they had enjoyed several times before; Restaurant Q (the incumbent option). Participants then imagined that they had won a contest drawing and had a choice between gift certificates for dinner at two places; Restaurant Q (the incumbent with an existing reservation) and Restaurant R. In the aspirant condition, participants were told that Restaurant R was by far the nicest restaurant in the area. In the non-aspirant condition, participants were told that Restaurant R was comparable to Restaurant Q. During this anticipatory phase, participants indicated how hopeful and excited they were about Restaurant R. This served as a manipulation check for the desirability of the anticipated option. Participants were then contacted by the contest holder and told that Restaurant R had been closed due to an accident and was no longer an option. A series of emotional responses were then recorded, including experienced sadness and experienced anger (e.g., “Imagine how you would feel right now… “I would feel sad”, “I would feel angry”), on 1-to-7 scales from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Participants then selected between the incumbent (Restaurant R) and a new, comparable option (Restaurant V). Like studies 2 and 3, participants also provided two choice likelihood ratings, one for the incumbent and one for the comparable option, on a scale from “Definitely would not choose” (1) to “Definitely would choose” (7). The study ended with participants answering a series of demographic questions (e.g., gender, age), and an open-ended question to identify hypothesis guessing.

Results

Manipulation check. As predicted, respondents in the Aspirant (vs. Non-aspirant) condition reported greater excitement ($M_{Aspirant} = 6.33, M_{Non-Aspirant} = 5.26; F(1,83) = 31.25, p < .01$) and hopefulness ($M_{Aspirant} = 5.55, M_{Non-Aspirant} = 5.02; F(1,83) = 5.82, p < .05$). No responses to the open-ended question about the study’s purpose correctly identified one or more study hypotheses.

Preference for the incumbent. A binary logistic regression examining choice-share of the incumbent option revealed a significant main effect of desirability. Consistent with the results of studies 1-3, individuals who were jilted by having a highly desirable aspirant option introduced and then withdrawn revealed a lower preference for the incumbent option (Non-Aspirant = 81.40%; Aspirant = 61.90%; Chi-squared = 3.98, p < .05). Analysis of the two 7-point choice likelihood ratings of choosing the incumbent (reverse scoring the anticipated option rating and
averaged), demonstrated the same pattern of results ($M_{\text{Non-Aspirant}} = 5.33$ vs. $M_{\text{Aspirant}} = 4.71$; $F(1,83) = 3.48$, $p = .067$). Consistent with our conceptualization of the jilting effect, individuals who experienced a jilt (i.e., who had been promised a highly desirable aspirant option whose access was later blocked) demonstrated decreased preference for the incumbent. These results are consistent with the findings of studies 1-3.

**Mediating roles of post-jilt sadness and anger.** Analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between anticipatory incumbent denigration and post-jilt sadness and anger in determining post-jilt preference. Specifically, we conducted a test for mediation (Hayes 2012: Process model 4) with Desirability as the independent variable, sadness and anger as parallel mediators, and incumbent choice likelihood as the dependent variable. Results indicated a significant indirect effect through sadness (indirect effect = -.24; 95% CI [-.57 to -.07]). No indirect effect through anger emerged (95% CI contained 0). These results are consistent with the findings of Study 4. That is, sadness was greater when access to a highly desirable aspirant was blocked, and this emotion undermined preference for the incumbent.