

Coping with it: Regret for Action vs. Inaction in the Consumer Context

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the differences between regret for purchases and regret for non-purchases, through the use of both narratives and quantitative analysis. It was found that, although the regret experienced for purchases is greater than that felt for non-purchases, the latter is also significantly intense. The results also suggest that the reasons for regretting a purchase differ from those for regretting a non-purchase, even though the product types and prices were essentially the same. In addition, the coping mechanisms employed differed for the two types of regret, with regret for non-purchase requiring a greater variety of coping mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

"Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is inconsolable."

-Sydney J. Harris. *Strictly Personal*

As true as this quote may ring in our ears, research on regret in consumer behavior has only focused on regret for things we've done, rather than for those we haven't. A few recent studies in psychology (Zeelenberg, van den Bos, van Dijk and Pieters, 2002; Seta, McElroy and Seta, 2001; Tykocinski and Pittman, 1998; Savitsky, Medvec and Gilovich, 1997; Gilovich and Medvec, 1995), however, have found support for what our literary colleagues have so poignantly noted for some time. They found that while regret for things we have done is stronger than for things we did not in the short run, the reverse is true in the long term. And even though regret for actions may be stronger than for inaction in the near term, that is not to say regret for inaction is inconsequential.

Since research on regret in consumer behavior has largely focused on regret following a purchase decision (Cooke, Meyvis and Schwartz, 2001; Tsiros and Mittal, 2000), the first objective of the current research is to explore the differences between regret for action (making a purchase) vs. inaction (not making a purchase) in the consumption context. We investigate the degree and frequency of these types of regret, and compare the emotions that accompany them. Further, we explore whether differences exist between types of products, and types of regret.

Given that the feeling of regret is a common occurrence in the consumption context, understanding how individuals cope with it is of considerable importance. Yet, virtually no research has been done to examine how consumers cope with regret in the consumption context. An understanding of consumer coping strategies in the context of regret will provide insights on its effects on future purchase behavior and satisfaction. Thus, our second objective is to explore how consumers cope with regret of action vs. inaction. We suggest here that consumer coping with regret, like consumer coping in other areas currently under study, can be categorized into behavioral vs. emotional coping, and goal-avoidant vs. goal-attendant, representing all basic coping options available to consumers: behavior, emotion, perseverance, and avoidance. Before elaborating on such arguments in detail, however, it is necessary to first review previous findings on regret in general, and in the consumer context in particular.

REGRET: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The experience of regret is among the most commonly shared in human life: being forced to make choices on a routinely basis, it is unavoidable that more often than not we'll engage in ill-considered behaviors, or fail to pursue courses of action that, in retrospect, would have been beneficial to us. In our everyday conversations, regret is the most frequently named emotion, after love (Shimanoff, 1984).

The study of regret has been approached from numerous angles, reflecting the complexity and importance of the phenomenon. The first approaches came through the philosophy literature, where efforts were directed at defining the concept of regret and distinguishing it from related states such as disappointment, guilt, and remorse (deSousa 1987; Landman 1987a; Landman 1987b). There is agreement among scholars that regret is an "unusually cognitively-laden or cognitively-determined emotion." (Gilovich and Medvec 1995). Hampshire (1960, pg. 241) states that the feeling of regret about a decision requires one to "think practically" about the decision, and not merely to inspect one's feelings. It seems that judgment is more central to the experience of regret than to the experience of other emotions such as anger or jealousy, for instance (Gilovich and Medvec 1995).

A widely accepted definition of regret is Landman's (1993, pg. 36), who defines it as "a more or less painful cognitive and emotional state of feeling sorry for misfortunes, limitations, losses, transgressions, shortcomings, or mistakes. It is an experience of felt-reason or reasoned emotion." In her definition, Landman also makes a distinction between "sins of commission" and "sins of omission." We next discuss these two forms of regret.

Regretting What We Did Vs. Regretting What We Failed To Do

Research on counterfactual thinking (Kahneman and Miller 1986; Miller et al. 1990) has shown that the distinction between action and inaction has important hedonic consequences. Consistent findings suggest that, assuming equally negative outcomes, people experience more regret over things they did, than over things they failed to do (Gleicher et al. 1990; Kahneman and Tversky 1982; Landman 1987a). Kahneman and Miller (1986) advance as an explanation that "it is usually easier to imagine oneself abstaining from an action that one has carried out than carrying out actions that were not in fact performed."

Despite the intuitive appeal of Kahneman and Miller's interpretation, and the weight of the experimental evidence, Gilovich and Medvec (1995) have suggested that in some instances people who are asked to think about their biggest regrets in life tend to focus on instances of inaction rather than action—that is, they tend to mention more things that they wish they had done than things they wish they hadn't. The explanation offered by Gilovich and Medvec is that regrettable failures to act may have a longer "half-life" than regrettable actions. They suggest that "sins of commission" are more regretted in the short term, while "sins of omission" are more regretted in the long run.

The reasons advanced to explain this pattern of temporal shift in the experience of regret are varied. Gilovich and Medvec (1995)

TABLE 1
Causes of the Temporal Pattern to the Experience of Regret¹

<i>Factors that reduce the pain of regrettable actions more than the pain of regrettable inactions</i>	
Behavioral repair work:	More compensatory steps tend to be taken to ameliorate regrettable actions.
Psychological repair work I:	More silver lining tend to be associated with regrettable actions.
Psychological repair work II:	More dissonance reduction tends to be induced by regrettable actions.
<i>Factors that increase the pain of regrettable inactions more than the pain of regrettable actions</i>	
Inexplicable inaction I:	The passage of time brings an increase in retrospective confidence that makes earlier failures to act inexplicable, and hence inexcusable.
Inexplicable inaction II:	Because factors that inhibit behavior tend to be less salient than those that induce behavior, failures to act can seem inexplicable, and increasingly so with the passage of time.
What was versus what might have been:	The consequences of regrettable actions tend to be finite; the consequences of regrettable inaction tend to be psychologically infinite.
<i>Factors that promote the cognitive availability of regrettable inactions more than the availability of regrettable actions</i>	
The Zeigarnik effect:	Regrettable failures to act tend to be more memorable and enduring than regrettable actions.

¹Adapted from Gilovich and Medvec (1995)

propose three types of factors: a) factors that reduce the regret of action more than the regret of inaction; b) factors that increase the regret of inaction more than the regret of action; and c) factors that promote the cognitive availability of inactions more than that of actions. Table 1 summarizes those factors.

Regret In Consumer Behavior

The study of regret in the consumer behavior literature has been scant, and limited to regretting purchases—that is, “sins of commission.” The main studies conducted in the marketing literature thus far have dealt with consumers’ efforts to avoid feeling regret in the future, and how that affects purchasing behavior. For example, Simonson (1992) looked at the role played by anticipated regret in purchase decisions. Tsiros and Mittal (2000) found that, while satisfaction directly influences both repurchase and complaint intentions, regret directly influences only repurchase intentions. Their study also shows that regret is experienced even in the absence of information on a better-forgone outcome. More recently, Cooke et al (2001) contributed to our understanding of regret by analyzing the effect of pre- and post-purchase outcome evaluations on the experience of regret and satisfaction. To our knowledge, ours is the first attempt at shedding light into consumers’ “sins of omission”—that is, regret felt for things they didn’t buy but wish they had—and with coping mechanisms employed after the regretted action/inaction has occurred. In the following section, we review the literature on coping mechanisms.

COPING WITH REGRET

From the discussion above we can see that significant work has been done on regret in general. Less has been done on regret in a consumption context, and little at all examines the differences between regret for purchases made vs. regret for purchases not made. Further, although studies have addressed *avoiding* regret, almost nothing is known about how consumers might cope with regret *after* an ill-advised decision to purchase or not to purchase has been made. In order to gain an understanding of coping strategies in this context, it is necessary to first review work on

coping on the whole, and then more specifically in the consumer context. First, however, a definition of coping as employed in this research is in order.

While previous research has examined coping from a variety of perspectives, current thinking generally conceptualizes coping as a process. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) offer a useful process definition of coping: “[coping is] constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). As the authors explain, this definition draws a distinction between active coping and automatic behavior; does not confound coping with outcomes; and stresses management over mastery. This definition of coping will be used in the context of investigating coping with regret in this research.

The process of coping consists of stress, emotions, and appraisals, and coping itself. As such, coping, along with appraisal, is essentially a mediator of the emotional reaction (or outcome) of a stressful encounter (Folkman and Lazarus 1988).

There is no universally effective or ineffective coping strategy, since coping is a dynamic process based upon appraised relational meanings across individuals and contexts. Thus the way in which someone deals with one threat may differ from the way in which they cope with another (Lazarus 1999). Lazarus’ theory posits that coping responses to appraisals may be either emotion-focused or problem-focused (Folkman et al. 1986). Lazarus describes problem-focused coping as thoughts or actions directed at managing or altering the problem causing the distress, and emotion-focused coping as thoughts or actions directed at regulating emotional response to the problem (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, p. 150). These two functions are not mutually exclusive, and can both be used in the same situation.

Regulatory Focus: Behavioral And Emotional Coping

While categorizing coping strategies along a problem- vs. emotion-focused dimension is helpful, it also confuses two central aspects of coping—the distinction between actions and emotions, and the distinction between efforts to attend to vs. avoid one’s goal.

Thus, a two-dimensional typology may provide more insight into the coping process (Lancellotti 2002). These two separate dimensions are labeled here as regulatory-focus and goal-focus. Regulatory-focus refers to whether coping is focused externally (on actions to handle environmental factors) or internally (on attempts to reappraise the situation in a more positive light). These are labeled behavioral and emotional coping, respectively.

Goal Focus: Goal-Attendant Vs. Goal-Avoidant

Goal-attendant coping responses are those aimed at overcoming the problem or failure in order to continue working towards the original goal (Lancellotti 2002). Consumers who have a positive attitude and perceive that they have the ability (resources) to overcome the failure situation will maintain their high expectations and remain hopeful. On the other hand, goal-avoidant coping responses are those responses that represent a shift from the original goal-focus to one of immediate distress reduction (which may or may not be a temporary shift).

Goal-avoidant coping involves the physical, cognitive, or emotional removal of the source of distress. In the consumer context, when the consumer regrets a purchase they did or did not make, avoidance may indeed take the form of complete removal of the distress source. A consumer may choose to push the purchase out of their mind completely, perhaps even hiding the product or giving it to a friend. The other side of this dimension, goal-attendant coping, refers to sticking to the original goal for which the product was bought and trying to overcome the regrettable situation, rather than avoiding it completely.

Coping with Commission vs. Omission

As mentioned earlier, we know too little about the differences between regret for purchase vs. regret for non-purchase, and nothing at all about how consumers might cope with these types of regret after the fact. We surmise that, since the causes of these forms of regret are different (i.e., having bought vs. *not* having bought a product) the nature of regret, and the mechanisms elicited to cope with it, should also differ. Consider Kahneman and Miller's (1986) assertion that it is easier for us to imagine ourselves not engaging in an action that we have performed, than engaging in actions that we didn't actually carry out: This could suggest that, in behavioral coping, we might find easier to find comfort in the thought that we have "learned a lesson," and will not make the same mistake (i.e., unwise purchase) in the future again. The possible differences in coping with regret for purchase vs. non-purchase are at this point purely conjectural, and thus it becomes necessary to explore them in our study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following study is a descriptive study that aims (1) to explore the differences between regret for action (making a purchase) vs. inaction (not making a purchase) in the consumption context and (2) to provide an initial framework of consumer coping with regret, both for action and inaction.

METHODOLOGY

Sixty-one undergraduate students (32 males and 29 females) at a large west coast university participated in this research for course credit. Each subject responded to one of two versions of a questionnaire. One version asked subjects to "please think about something that you bought in the past, but wish you hadn't" ($n=31$) while the other version asked subjects to "please think about something you did not buy in the past, but wish you had" ($n=30$). Subjects were then asked to briefly describe the item they did/did

not purchase, why they wish they hadn't/had purchased the item, the reasons for not purchasing the item and the thoughts that went through their mind after they had left the store. Subjects were then asked to rate on a 9-point Likert scale the extent to which they regret purchasing/not purchasing the item. Subjects were also provided with 26 measures of 12 different coping strategies (Table 2), and asked to check off which ones applied to what they did after the purchase/non purchase incident described. The typology of coping strategies included items that reflected both coping regulatory-focus (Folkman et al. 1986) and goal-focus (Lancellotti, 2002).

RESULTS

Experiencing Regret

Subjects reported the extent of regret they experienced due to purchase or non-purchase. Consistent with the literature of regret (see Zeelenberg et al, 2002), the extent of regret for purchase ($M=6.93$) was significantly higher than the extent of regret for non-purchase ($M=5.93$), $F(1, 58)=4.39$, $p<0.05$. Despite the regret for non-purchase being lower than the regret for purchase, it was significantly higher than the midpoint of 4.5, thereby confirming that the subjects did experience considerable regret from non-purchase. The average time lapsed since the incidents reported was 12 months, with the most recent being 2 days and the most distant being 96 months. Although the difference in time lapse was not significant, results suggest that the average time lapsed since the regretted purchase (14.98 months) is larger than that for the regretted non-purchase (9.26 months). The fact that purchases were significantly more regretted than non-purchases would explain the relatively higher salience of these "sins of action" in memory.

Comparing Regret for Purchase and Regret for Non-Purchase

An analysis of the open-ended responses revealed that subjects reported equally rich experiences with incidents of non-purchase (regret of inaction) as with experiences of purchase (regret of action). An analysis of the word count of the two versions suggests that subjects devoted substantial effort to the task, hinting at the relevance and bearing that regretted behavior has on them. Open-ended descriptions averaged 71 words for regretted purchases and averaged 77 words for non-purchase. Narratives of how subjects coped with regret averaged 52 words for purchase, and 57 words for non-purchase. No difference between the extent of elaboration for incidents of purchase and incidents of non-purchase was observed ($F=.517$, $p=.47$). This seems to confirm our previous assessment to the effect that both types of regret (action vs. inaction) are comparable as sources of concern for individuals. An analysis of the open-ended responses for emotional content revealed that the main emotions reported in both the case of regret of purchase and regret of non-purchase was negative emotions (regret, sadness, disappointment, anger and guilt). In the case of non-purchase 20% of the subjects explicitly referred to experiencing regret while in the case of purchase 23% did.

The analysis revealed that the types of products in both the regret of purchase and regret of non-purchase were quite similar. Products reported were mainly hedonic (83%), durable (96%) and highly priced (74%). Some examples of the products subjects mentioned were electronics (for example: DVD players, television sets, speakers, Playstation 2, printers, etc), items of clothing (for example: leather jacket, dress, sweater, shirt) and services (gym membership).

The reasons for purchasing or not purchasing the target item were analyzed and were found to be different for the two conditions. The reasons subjects in the regret-purchase condition gave were

TABLE 2
A Typology of Coping Strategies

Emotion Focused (Aimed at Regulating Emotions)	Problem Focused (Aimed at Regulating Behavior)
<i>Goal-Attendant Coping</i>	
<p>Seeking Social Support for Emotional Reasons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Talked to someone about how I was feeling. <input type="checkbox"/> I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice. <p>Positive Reinterpretation and Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive. <input type="checkbox"/> I learn something from the experience. <p>Turning to Religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I seek God's help. <input type="checkbox"/> I try to find comfort in my religion. <p>Emotional Restraint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I tried to keep my feelings to myself. <input type="checkbox"/> I tried to keep my feelings from interfering with other things too much. 	<p>Aggressive Action: Confrontative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stood my ground and fought for what I wanted. <input type="checkbox"/> I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem. <p>Calculated Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work. <input type="checkbox"/> I made a plan of action and followed it. <p>Constructive Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did. <input type="checkbox"/> I try to get advice from someone about what to do. <p>Behavioral Restraint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon. <input type="checkbox"/> I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly
<i>Goal-Avoidant-focused coping</i>	
<p>Emotional Evasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it. <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't let it get to me; refused to think about it too much. <p>Denial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I pretend that it hasn't really happened. <input type="checkbox"/> I act as though it hasn't even happened. <p>Emotional Release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I get upset and let my emotions out. <input type="checkbox"/> I let my feelings out. 	<p>Concession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I learn to live with it. <input type="checkbox"/> I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time. <p>Behavioral Evasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with. <input type="checkbox"/> Tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication, and so forth.

that the purchase was made impulsively (42%), the item was on sale or that it was a good deal (32%) or that they had always wanted to buy it (29%). Other reasons included that they were tempted (19%), they were persuaded by the salesperson (10%) or that a friend convinced them (6.5%). However, subjects in the regret-non-purchase condition reported that the main reason they did not purchase the target item was a budget constraint (70%). Other reasons for non-purchase included waiting for or expecting a better deal in the future (27%) and convenience (13%) i.e. not wanting to stand in line or avoiding a crowd at the store.

In attempting to determine the reasons why subjects experienced regret in both the purchase and the non-purchase condition, we found that the main reasons for regret in the purchase condition was that subjects found that the item that they purchased was not useful (74%), not worth the money (35.5%) or was obsolete (16%). In the case of non-purchase, all subjects experienced regret because they believed that they should have made the purchase (obviously). However, the experience of regret for non-purchase was also due to the fact that subjects saw the non-purchase as a lost opportunity (80%) or as a better option than what they had actually bought (23%).

Coping Strategies for Regret of Purchase and Regret of Non-Purchase

Table 3 shows the incidence of coping strategies subjects relied on to deal with the regret experienced after a purchase and non-purchase incident. The results in Table 3 show that coping with regret of purchase and regret of non-purchase involves a mixture of coping strategies, behavioral and emotion focused coping as well as goal-attendant and goal-avoidant coping. Interestingly, in terms of sheer numbers, coping with regret for non-purchase involved the utilization of a greater number (216) of different coping responses than coping with regret for purchases (187). The difference in number of coping mechanisms used between conditions is significant at the 90% level (sig.=0.086). The most commonly employed coping strategy across both regret of action as well as regret of inaction was goal-avoidant problem focused coping ("I learned to live with it") and goal-attendant emotional coping ("I tried to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive" or "I learned something from the experience").

To further examine the combination of coping strategies associated with the regret of action vs. the regret of inaction, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The factor analysis was

TABLE 3
Coping Strategies for Regret of Purchase and Non-Purchase

Coping Strategy	Regret Purchase	Regret Non-purchase
I talked to someone about how I was feeling.	15	19
I tried to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.	17	23
I asked people who have had similar experiences what they did.	9	6
I sought God's help.	2	1
I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.	6	6
I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice	5	9
I tried to find comfort in my religion.	-	1
I made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it.	16	20
I learned to live with it	24	25
I didn't let it get to me; refused to think about it too much.	17	17
I tried to keep my feelings to myself.	3	5
I learned something from the experience	23	17
I tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication	2	1
I restrained myself from doing anything too quickly.	7	8
I got upset and let my emotions out.	2	1
I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.	-	1
I tried to keep my feelings from interfering with other things too much.	3	4
I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work.	2	2
I let my feelings out.	2	4
I made a plan of action and followed it.	5	11
I expressed anger to someone about the problem.	5	3
I tried to get advice from someone about what to do.	8	9
I made sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon.	2	11
I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time.	12	12

performed on the coping responses for each group (action and inaction) to provide an initial assessment of the different types of coping strategies associated with regret of purchase and regret of non-purchase. Though the number of subjects at this stage in the investigation was too low to establish conclusive categorizations, this exploratory factor analysis was quite helpful in painting a preliminary picture of differences in consumers' coping across the two situations.

It was found that consumers did indeed cope differently, depending on what it was they regretted. Using principal components analysis, with a factor loading of .5 as a cutoff, the coping responses reported by subjects who experienced regret for *making* a purchase loaded primarily on three factors (Table 4). These were *Serious Actors*, *Emotional Avoiders*, and *Emotional Expressers*. The *Serious Actors* group represents behavioral coping with the aim of attending to the problem, such as making a plan of action, or getting advice from others. Individuals in this group are unlikely to cope through emotional avoidance, such as making light of the situation, or refusing to think about it. The *Emotional Avoiders* engaged in those coping strategies specifically not used by those in the Action group: they wish the situation would go away, and try to keep their feelings from interfering with other activities.. The *Emotional Expressers* engaged in a combination of emotional release and expressing their feelings to others, both through venting and seeking advice.

A similar factor analysis was conducted for consumers coping with regret for *not* having made a purchase (see Table 5 above) revealed that these people coped with things a bit differently. For one they were more varied in their coping mechanisms, and the groups were less homogeneous. Thus, subjects could broadly be

categorized in four groups based on their coping strategies. The first group consists of those people who sought advice and expressed their feelings to others. This group is labeled the *Outreachers*. Other subjects tended to simply vent their emotions (*Emotional Non-Actors*): "I got upset and let my emotions out;" "I expressed anger to someone about the problem." The third group took aggressive action, yet did so without expressing emotions (*Emotionless Fighters*), while the fourth group simply focused their efforts in a thoughtful manner, carefully gauging their actions (*Conscientious Actors*).

Again, an important consideration in evaluating these results is that the number of subjects is low, and little variance exists for each coping strategy, due to the binomial nature of their measurement scales. Thus, the groups described above can only be characterized as initial tendencies, rather than stable types. Additional investigation with a larger subject pool, using measures with greater variance, is necessary to verify these findings, and parse out some of the irregularities.

DISCUSSION

Our objective in undertaking this study was to explore the differences in regret for action vs. inaction in consumer behavior. We reported the degree and frequency of these two types of regret and the consumption situations that give rise to the regret of action vs. the regret of inaction. In addition, we also examined ways in which subjects coped with regret in each of these situations.

Our results indicate that subjects did experience regret from both action (purchase) as well as inaction (non-purchase). In accordance with previous psychology literature, we also found that the extent of regret of action (purchase) is significantly greater than

TABLE 4
Coping with Regret for Purchase

	Serious Actors	Emotional Avoiders	Emotional Expressers
I made a plan of action and followed it	0.836		
I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work	0.767		
I learned to live with it	-0.702		
I made light of the situation; refused to get too upset about it	-0.649		
I didn't let it get to me; refused to think about it too much	-0.577		
I tried to keep my feelings from interfering with other things too much		0.86	
I tried to keep my feelings to myself		0.799	
I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with		0.605	
I got upset and let my emotions out			0.744
I talked to someone about how I was feelings			0.7
I asked a friend or relative I respected for advice			0.584
Eigenvalues	2.82	2.56	2.01

regret of inaction (non-purchase). Interestingly, however, a greater number and variety of coping responses were employed to cope with regret of inaction. In addition, an exploratory factor analysis revealed that subjects do cope differently with regret of action (purchase) compared to regret of inaction (non-purchase).

Although we believe that this research is a significant first step in demonstrating the importance of regret of inaction (non-purchase) in a consumption context as well as the variety of coping strategies employed to cope with regret, we nonetheless are aware of the limitations of this research. First, in "requiring" consumers to describe incidents of purchase and non-purchase regret we may have obtained reports with varying levels of importance and accessibility. Second, the time lapse between the actual feelings of regret and the subjective reporting of coping responses are likely to suffer from memory biases. Last, our sample was quite small and some of our results may not be generalizable.

This research has barely scratched the surface of the issues underlying the importance of the experience of regret in consumer behavior and despite its limitations, presents some noteworthy directions for future research. Our plan for future studies includes investigating issues related to impulsive behavior. For instance, could it be that—paradoxically—an "excess of self control" that resulted in not purchasing something and regretting it, leads later to

impulsively buying a substitute—perhaps a less satisfactory one, or paying more than planned, which would result in further regret? Similarly, is anticipated regret an antecedent to impulsive purchases? Also, this preliminary study didn't allow us to clearly identify the antecedents and moderating factors in the experience of regret: what makes a purchase later on "undesirable"? What prevents us from purchasing something that later we regret we had? A better understanding of these issues would enable consumers to avoid falling into the trap of ill-advised purchases, and marketers to tailor their communications to overcome the customers' perceived (but unsubstantiated) reasons for not buying what they actually want and can.

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TABLE 5:
Coping with Regret for Non-Purchase

	Outreachers	Emotional Non-Actors	Emotionless Fighters	Conscientious Actors
I asked a friend or relative for advice	0.841			
I tried to get advice from someone about what to do	0.826			
I asked people who have had similar experiences what they did	0.591			
I talked to someone about how I was feeling	0.581			
I expressed anger to someone about the problem		0.836		
I got upset and let my emotions out		0.802		
I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted			0.816	
I tried to keep my feelings to myself			0.791	
I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work				0.875
I made sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon				0.539
Eigenvalues	2.70	1.93	1.67	1.24

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