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## Deserving to Indulge and Donate: Drivers of Virtuous Consumer Behavior

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# 3

**Chapter 3 | You Deserve to Donate: Selectivity  
Promotes Prosocial Behavior Among Entitled  
Consumers**

**Abstract**

Research finds that psychological entitlement—a sense that one deserves more than others—typically reduces prosocial behavior. However, we propose that entitled consumers donate significantly more time and money when the prosocial behavior is framed as a selective opportunity offered to them in particular. We posit that the effectiveness of this selectivity framing is limited to consumers high in entitlement because selectivity may validate their distinctiveness. We assess these predictions in four experiments and find that being offered a selective prosocial opportunity indeed promotes prosocial behavior among those high (but not those low) in entitlement. Furthermore, this effect is specific to a high “vulnerable-based” form (vs. “grandiose-based” form) of entitlement, is driven by a distinctiveness validation mechanism (vs. status affirmation or a sense of (un)due privilege), is robust across trait and state entitlement, and does not generalize to high self-esteem or narcissism. In sum, this research offers insights into how and why a subtle change in the framing of prosocial opportunities can boost prosocial behavior among entitled consumers.

*Keywords: entitlement; prosocial behavior; charity donations; selectivity; preferential treatment*

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### 3.1 Introduction

Consumers with a sense of psychological entitlement (hereafter *entitled consumers* for brevity) typically feel that they deserve more than others (Campbell et al., 2004). This sense of entitlement seems ubiquitous and has gained increased interest from both academic and popular media (Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Zaslow, 2007). Entitlement has various negative consequences, both for the entitled consumers themselves and for their environment (Zitek & Vincent, 2015). For example, past studies report a negative relationship between entitlement and prosocial practices such as volunteering and donating (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014), although much remains to be understood about this relationship.

We add to this line of research by considering the role of selectivity appeals. Consumption contexts frequently make consumers believe that they, and only they, have been selected to receive certain benefits or special treatment (Chan & Sengupta, 2010). Be it bogus or real, selectivity can strengthen customer–company relationships and create positive consumer responses (Chan & Sengupta, 2010; Homburg et al., 2008). However, it may also generate negative inferences about the organization (Eggert et al., 2015; Main et al., 2007). We investigate how selectivity influences prosocial behavior among the entitled.

Specifically, we propose and demonstrate that selectivity increases donated time (Experiments 1–2) and money (Experiments 3–4) among entitled consumers (but not among those low in entitlement). Furthermore, in Experiment 4, we further distinguish between two main rationales for feeling entitled, a “vulnerable-based” rationale and a “grandiose-based” rationale, respectively, and we demonstrate that the moderating effect is specific to vulnerable-based entitlement. Additionally, we find that the interplay between selectivity and vulnerable-based entitlement is mediated by distinctiveness validation. Being offered a selective opportunity that is denied to others

validates consumers' uniqueness, which in turn boosts prosocial behavior among (vulnerable-based) entitled consumers.

These findings contribute to research on consumer entitlement and prosocial behavior (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014) and to research on selectivity and preferential treatment (Eggert et al., 2015; Homburg et al., 2008). Furthermore, although charitable giving has increased in past years (Giving USA, 2020), the reliance on non-profit organizations has as well, due to increases in hunger, poverty, and income inequality (Brandolini & Smeeding 2011; Marte, 2020; Solt 2016). Hence, findings on how to promote prosocial behavior are also of practical and societal relevance.

### **3.2 Theoretical Background**

Psychological entitlement was originally defined as the *pervasive* sense that one deserves more than others (Campbell et al., 2004). However, entitlement can also manifest itself as a psychological state (O'Brien et al., 2011). For example, consumers can feel entitled after recalling a time in their lives when they have been treated unfairly (Zitek et al., 2010). The term entitlement has also been used to describe the extent to which consumers feel they are owed valuable resources, regardless of their efforts or performance (Harvey & Harris, 2010). Although positively (albeit weakly) correlated with self-esteem, and although originally conceptualized as a facet of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2004; Rose & Anastasio, 2014), entitlement is now considered a stand-alone construct with distinct intra- and inter-personal consequences (Rose & Anastasio, 2014; Stamkou et al., 2019). Feelings of entitlement seem largely based on two (non-mutually exclusive) rationales: consumers may feel entitled because they perceive being *deprived*, or because they perceive being *superior* (Hart, Tortoriello, & Breeden, 2020; Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020). Overall, entitlement can be

accompanied by both more inflated and more fragile self-esteem (Brown et al., 2009; Stronge et al., 2016, 2019). Furthermore, entitlement is typically non-pathological in nature, and assigns a more central role to others than narcissism, which is characterized by a morally disengaged self-centeredness (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013; Anastasio & Rose, 2014; Neville & Fisk, 2019; Pryor et al., 2008).

Entitled consumers are more competitive, aggressive, and less empathetic than those lower in entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004; Watson & Morris, 1991). Furthermore, they perceive tasks as a greater waste of their “precious” time (O’Brien et al., 2011). Accordingly, they are less likely to volunteer and help others (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014). Entitlement also reduces compliance with policy guidelines, such as the recent health guidelines issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Zitek & Schlund, 2021). However, inspired by past findings that compliance with requests depends on how they are framed (Fennis et al., 2009; Schlosser & Levy, 2016), we argue that specific appeals that match entitled consumers’ orientation may also promote prosocial behavior among entitled consumers. This research focuses on selectivity appeals.

Selectivity involves granting exclusive benefits or preferential treatment to some consumers, which are explicitly denied to others (Chan & Sengupta, 2010; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Wagner et al., 2009). Some studies report that consumers respond positively to such exclusive benefits (Homburg et al., 2008) whereas other studies highlight that selectivity appeals may lead to negative responses (Eggert et al., 2015; Main et al., 2007). Considering the interplay between selectivity and entitlement may help reconcile these mixed findings. Moreover, we contribute to past findings on selectivity by focusing on prosocial, other-oriented outcomes instead of commercial, more selfish outcomes.

Selectivity leads to advantageous inequity between the consumer and others

(Loewenstein et al., 1989; Barone & Roy, 2010). This inequity may lead to different responses across consumers. Similar to owning a unique product, being offered a selective opportunity could validate selected consumers' perceived distinctiveness, a powerful and fundamental consumer motive according to optimal distinctiveness theory (White & Argo, 2011). However, according to optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), there is a fundamental tension between this motive and a motive for assimilation. Moreover, the relative strength of these motives varies across consumers and contexts. For instance, prior work suggests that the impact of distinctiveness validation will be stronger among entitled consumers, because they have a high need to express their perception of being different (Campbell et al., 2004; Zitek & Vincent, 2015). Conversely, being distinguished may not be perceived as positively by those low in entitlement, because they do not feel deserving of it (Campbell et al., 2004; Eggert et al., 2015). Hence, entitled consumers should respond particularly positively to a selective opportunity that distinguishes them, whereas those low in entitlement should not.

Four experiments test these propositions and the proposed mechanisms. Across experiments, we address various alternate explanations for the effects. Sample sizes were determined a priori and we used consistent exclusion criteria across experiments.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the effect sizes reported in recent work on psychological entitlement (Stamkou et al., 2019; Zitek & Vincent, 2015) and a meta-analysis on personality traits and prosocial behavior (Thielmann et al., 2020), we expected a small to medium effect size for the focal interaction. A priori power analysis using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009) indicated a sample size of  $N = 101$  to detect this interaction (with 80% power,  $\alpha = .05$ ). We used this as a minimum with more participants included if our time and budgets would allow. The final sample sizes of all experiments exceeded this minimum. We consistently excluded participants who failed an (identical) attention check question or who created missing values by failing to complete the focal tasks (e.g., due to technical issues or not adhering to the writing instructions). Exclusions never exceeded 4.6% of the gross sample and did not alter the pattern of results for any study.

### 3.3 Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, we measured trait entitlement and manipulated the framing of the prosocial opportunity (selective vs. non-selective) in a between-subjects design to test our prediction that a selective (vs. non-selective) framing increases prosocial behavior among entitled consumers.

#### 3.3.1 Method

We recruited 215 American members of a Qualtrics panel for participation in Experiment 1 (65% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 44.85$ ,  $SD = 14.72$ ). The dependent measure was time donated through an optional prosocial task.

First, as our original aim was to manipulate entitlement, we randomly assigned participants to one of two sentence rearrangement tasks; they either rearranged 12 entitlement-related sentences or 12 neutral sentences (cf. Zitek & Vincent, 2015). Afterwards, participants were presented with an optional prosocial task, modelled after real initiatives that use video engagement to raise donations (e.g., [www.youtube.com/give](http://www.youtube.com/give) and [www.wegiveit.co.uk](http://www.wegiveit.co.uk)). Specifically, participants were free to watch (part of) a 9-minute video about Reach Out and Read (a charitable organization promoting children's literacy, see [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org)). They were told that, for every minute they watched, \$0.25 would be donated to the charity on their behalf. Furthermore, in the selective condition, each participant was told that “*we specifically selected you for this opportunity*” and that it would not be offered to all study participants. In the non-selective condition, participants were told that this opportunity was offered to all participants.<sup>8</sup> (See Appendix 3.A for the selectivity

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<sup>8</sup> In an earlier, unreported pilot study ( $N = 247$ ), we developed this manipulation and gauged its effectiveness using a 9-point semantic-scale item (not selective–selective). We found that the prosocial opportunity was perceived as more selective when it was framed as selective ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD =$



manipulation and instructions.) The time people donated by watching the video (0–553 seconds) served as our dependent measure. A total of \$234.00 was raised and donated to Reach Out and Read on behalf of the participants. After being presented with the video, participants completed the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell et al., 2004; e.g., “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “I do not necessarily deserve special treatment” (reverse-scored); 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .88$ ). As the sentence rearrangement task (entitlement-related vs. neutral sentences) did not significantly influence PES scores ( $F < 1$ ) or prosocial behavior (see Appendix 3.B), we used the PES as independent trait measure in the analyses.

### 3.3.2 Results

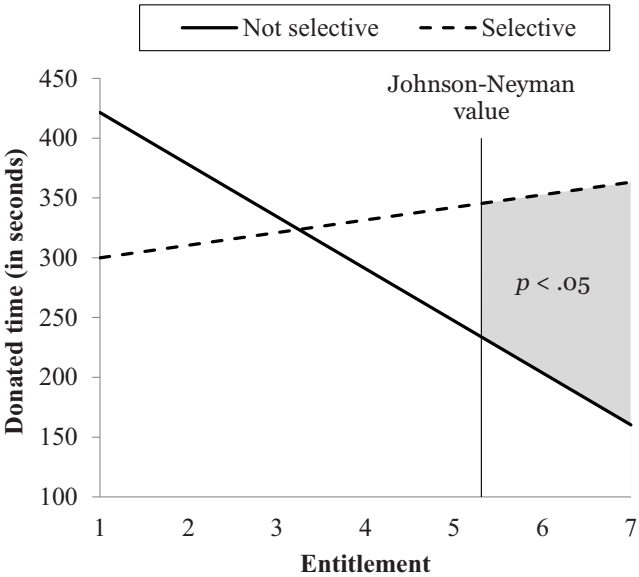
A randomization check to verify the distribution of the sample data indicates that PES scores were not significantly different across selective and non-selective framing conditions ( $t(213) = 1.46, p = .15$ ). Next, we conducted a multiple linear regression to test the interaction effect of selectivity and entitlement on donated time. The effects of selectivity ( $B = 6.17, SE = 31.10, p = .84$ ) and entitlement ( $B = -16.50, SE = 12.14, p = .18$ ) were not significant. However, the interaction between selectivity and entitlement was significant ( $B = 54.09, SE = 24.27, p = .03$ ; Figure 3.1). Decomposing this interaction using floodlight analysis (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013; Hayes, 2018) indicated one region of significance—the conditional effect of selectivity on donated time was significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive for values of entitlement at or above 5.31 ( $M + 1.52 SD; B = 111.48, SE = 56.55$ ; 8.4% of participants’

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2.70) than when it was framed as being offered to all participants ( $M = 4.15, SD = 2.39; t(245) = -1.93, p = .05$ ). Experiment details are available upon request. We also validate the effectiveness of our selectivity manipulation in Experiments 3 and 4.

entitlement scores were above this point). Hence, as proposed, selectivity only increased donated time among consumers who reported higher levels of entitlement. There was a marginally significant negative effect of selectivity on donated time among the lowest values of entitlement (e.g.,  $B = -121.55$ ,  $SE = 65.23$ ,  $p = .06$  at  $M - 1.84 SD$ ).

**Figure 3.1** Donated time as a function of selectivity and entitlement in Experiment 1



### 3.3.3 Discussion

This study provides initial evidence that framing a charitable opportunity as selective boosts donations among entitled consumers, in line with our proposition that entitled consumers (but not those low in entitlement) respond positively to such a distinctiveness validation. This experiment also hints at the possibility that selectivity may reduce donations of those low in entitlement, which we further reflect on in the General Discussion.

It could be that measuring entitlement after the prosocial task influenced self-reported entitlement. Furthermore, given that entitlement and self-esteem

theoretically both represent forms of high self-regard and given previously found positive (albeit weak) correlations between both constructs (Brown et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2004), it could be that the effects are driven by self-esteem instead of by entitlement. More generally, as self-esteem has also been found to relate to prosocial behavior (Baumeister et al., 2003; Yu et al., 2018), it may form a conceptually relevant covariate offering a more powerful test of our effects (Meyvis & Van Osselaer, 2018). These notions are incorporated in Experiment 2.

### 3.4 Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, we test the robustness of the interaction between selectivity and entitlement by using a different measurement order and by replicating the analysis while controlling for self-esteem.

#### 3.4.1 Method

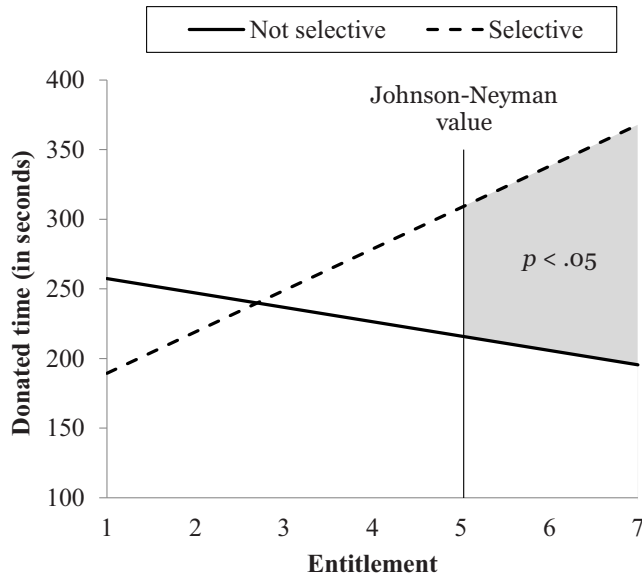
We used the observations of a sample of 249 Amazon Mechanical Turk participants (56% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.89$ ,  $SD = 12.36$ ). Experiment 2 included the same selectivity manipulation, prosocial task, and entitlement measure (PES) as Experiment 1. However, unlike in Experiment 1, participants first completed the PES ( $\alpha = .91$ ), as well as Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure of self-esteem ( $\alpha = .93$ )<sup>9</sup> and were presented with the prosocial task afterwards. A total of \$297.50 was raised and donated to Reach Out and Read on behalf of the participants.

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<sup>9</sup> In this experiment, trait entitlement and self-esteem were not significantly correlated ( $p = .23$ ). In Experiment 4 we found a relatively modest correlation ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### 3.4.2 Results

As in Experiment 1, we verified that PES scores were not significantly different across selective and non-selective framing conditions ( $t(247) = -0.125, p = .90$ ). We next conducted a multiple linear regression to test the interaction of entitlement and selectivity on donated time. The results indicated that the coefficients of selectivity ( $B = 14.49, SE = 26.94, p = .59$ ) and entitlement ( $B = 9.71, SE = 9.90, p = .33$ ) were not significant. However, as in Experiment 1, there was a significant interaction between selectivity and entitlement ( $B = 40.06, SE = 19.80, p = .04$ ; Figure 3.2). Floodlight analysis using the Johnson-Neyman technique revealed one region of significance—the conditional effect of selectivity was significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive for values of entitlement at or above 5.03 ( $M + 1.44 SD$ ;  $B = 93.47, SE = 47.46$ ; 9.6% of the sample scored above this point). Next, we replicated this analysis while controlling for self-esteem and its interaction with selectivity. Importantly, we found robust evidence for the interaction effect between entitlement and selectivity (i.e., a positive conditional effect of selectivity among high entitlement levels), whereas the coefficients of self-esteem and its interaction with selectivity were not significant (see Table 3.1).

**Figure 3.2** Donated time as a function of selectivity and entitlement in Experiment 2**Table 3.1** Multiple linear regression results when controlling for self-esteem in Experiment 2

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	243.50	13.51	18.02	.00
Self-esteem (covariate)	-9.65	20.99	-0.46	.65
Selectivity × self-esteem (covariate)	-20.66	41.98	-0.49	.62
Selectivity	14.72	27.03	0.54	.59
Entitlement	9.77	9.96	0.98	.33
Selectivity × entitlement	40.41	19.93	2.03	.04

Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

### 3.4.3 Discussion

Experiment 2 illustrates that selectivity robustly increases prosocial behavior among entitled consumers after changing the measurement order. Selectivity did not increase (nor strongly decrease) donations among non-entitled consumers. The effects are also replicated after controlling for self-esteem.

One could argue that the prosocial behavior in Experiments 1 and 2 came at a limited cost, as participants watched a short video in order to donate money. In addition, not providing any information regarding the selection procedure may have led participants to believe it was purely random, biasing their responses. Finally, it remains unclear whether the effects generalize across trait and state entitlement. These limitations will be addressed in Experiment 3.

## 3.5 Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we manipulate entitlement, we focus on costlier prosocial behavior, and we include a profiling task to present as the basis for the selection of participants for the donation opportunity.

### 3.5.1 Method

We used the observations of 291 students at a European university (67% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 22.12$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ) who participated in a lab study in exchange for money. We used a 2 (framing: selective, non-selective)  $\times$  2 (entitlement: high, low) between-participants design. As in Experiment 2, we measured self-esteem to control for its effects. Moreover, we now systematically rotated the order in which self-esteem was measured (start vs. end of the study) to account for potential measurement order effects. Participants completed the same self-esteem scale as in Experiment 2 (Rosenberg, 1965,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

Either after completing the self-esteem measure or at the start of the procedure, participants completed a validated writing task (Stamkou et al., 2019; Zitek & Vincent, 2015) that manipulates entitlement. Specifically, participants in the high (vs. low) entitlement condition wrote down reasons why they would (vs. should not) deserve more than others. A pilot (lab) study ( $N = 289$ ) confirmed the effectiveness of this manipulation: scores on a 3-item measure of state entitlement (e.g., “Currently, I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “I feel entitled to more of everything right now”;  $\alpha = .87$ ) were significantly higher in the high-entitlement condition ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) than in the low-entitlement condition ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ;  $t(287) = -3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Afterwards, participants completed a bogus “profiling task” with personality questions before being redirected to the next part where participants were presented with the prosocial opportunity: they could donate (part of) their monetary lab compensation to a local foundation that supports refugee students (see [www.uaf.nl](http://www.uaf.nl)). Participants in the selective condition read that they were specifically selected because the donation opportunity fully matched their profile based on their previous answers. Those in the non-selective condition were told that all participants were offered this opportunity (see Appendix 3.C). All participants indicated on a slider how much they would donate (€0–8). We then assessed participants’ perceptions of the selectivity of the opportunity with two semantic-scale items (available to an unlimited–limited set of participants, available to many–few participants;  $r = .85$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

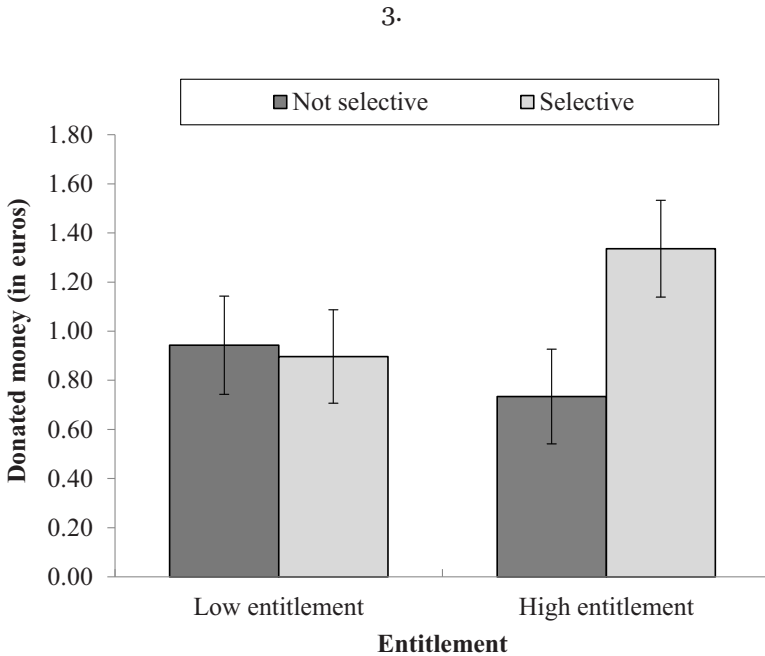
### 3.5.2 Results

**Manipulation check.** A 2 (framing: selective, non-selective)  $\times$  2 (entitlement: high, low) ANOVA confirmed that participants in the selective condition perceived the request to be more selective ( $M = 7.68$ ,  $SD = 2.50$ ) than participants in the non-

selective condition ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 2.45$ ;  $F(1, 287) = 260.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). No other significant main or interaction effects emerged (all  $p$ 's  $> .12$ ).

**Monetary Donations.** A 2 (selective, not selective)  $\times$  2 (entitlement: high, low) ANOVA indicated that the main effects of selectivity ( $F(1, 287) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .16$ ) and entitlement ( $F < 1$ ) on amount donated were not significant. However, the interaction between selectivity and entitlement was marginally significant ( $F(1, 287) = 2.76$ ,  $p = .10$ ; Figure 3.3). For participants in the high entitlement condition, framing the opportunity as selective produced significantly higher monetary donations ( $M = \text{€}1.34$ ,  $SD = 0.20$ ) than framing it as non-selective ( $M = \text{€}0.73$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ;  $F(1, 287) = 4.84$ ,  $p = .03$ ); for participants in the low entitlement condition, donations were not significantly different across selective and non-selective framings ( $F < 1$ ). A follow-up analysis in which we accounted for self-esteem, its interaction with selectivity, and its measurement order corroborated the robustness of the effect—the interaction between selectivity and entitlement was marginally significant ( $F(1, 281) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .09$ ; see Appendices 3.D–E for further details).



**Figure 3.3** Donated time as a function of selectivity and entitlement in Experiment

### 3.5.3 Discussion

Experiment 3 further supports the robustness of our findings. High entitlement participants donated significantly more money when the opportunity was framed as selective whereas low entitlement participants did not. However, we acknowledge that the overall interaction effect between selectivity and state entitlement was only marginally significant. Notable differences across trait and state entitlement were also found by Zitek & Vincent (2015), who hypothesize that the trait and state measures may differentially tap into distinct forms of entitlement, causing the strength of the effects to vary across trait and state manifestations.

To explore the possibility that this seeming state/trait difference is due to a varying effect across specific forms of entitlement, Experiment 4 includes both a unidimensional and a *multidimensional* measure of entitlement. According to Hart,

Tortoriello, & Richardson (2020), consumers' reasons for feeling entitled fall in two categories, a *deprivation* or vulnerable-based (PES-V) rationale and a *superiority* or grandiose-based (PES-G) rationale, respectively. PES-G seems primarily related to enhanced status motivation, whereas PES-V is primarily related to an enhanced sense of (relative) deprivation. Thus, we investigate whether selectivity boosts both high PES-V and high PES-G consumers' prosocial behavior or merely that of those high in a specific form of entitlement.

Apart from offering such potentially critical nuance, Experiment 4 further assess the robustness of the effects by testing whether the effects can be attributed to narcissism instead of (or in addition to) entitlement. Moreover, Experiment 4 tests our proposed mechanism by assessing whether the impact of the selective offer is driven by a validation of selected consumers' perceived distinctiveness (White & Argo, 2011). Finally, we consider two alternative mechanisms; selectivity could also appeal to entitled consumers because it provides or confirms feelings of status (Barone & Roy, 2010) or because they perceive the advantageous inequity as an (un)due privilege (Goor et al., 2020; Ordabayeva & Fernandes, 2018).

### **3.6 Experiment 4**

In Experiment 4, our aim was to explore whether the previous effects involving trait entitlement were robust, and to assess whether they are driven by vulnerable-based entitlement and/or grandiose-based entitlement. A further goal was to test whether the effectiveness of selectivity is mainly observed among entitled consumers because it validates their perceived distinctiveness, while ruling out two competing mechanisms.

### 3.6.1 Method

We used the observations of 501 Prolific participants (57% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 32.86$ ,  $SD = 11.57$ ). The included trait entitlement measure was the same as in Experiments 1–2 and the bogus profiling task and selectivity manipulation correspond with Experiment 3. In addition, we included a two-dimensional entitlement measure, narcissism and self-esteem measures, and three measures to assess our candidate mediators.

Participants started the study by completing the bogus “profiling task” as described in Experiment 3. Afterwards, we presented a prosocial opportunity that included our manipulation (framing: selective vs. non-selective). Following prior research (Canon & Rucker, 2020; Study 2), participants were told they had the opportunity to win \$100. Furthermore, they could donate (part of) this raffle prize to UNICEF. Specifically, the \$100 could be divided in any amount between Amazon gift cards for themselves and UNICEF donations—the amount donated (\$0-\$100) represented our dependent measure. As in Experiment 3, participants assigned to the selective framing were told that they were selected for the donation opportunity as it fully matched their profile; those assigned to the non-selective framing were told that all participants could donate. The (non-)selective cues were highlighted using a bold, blue-colored font. Next, we measured our proposed mediator, distinctiveness validation, using a 4-item scale based on White and Argo (2011; e.g., “To what degree does you receiving this opportunity validate your sense of being a unique individual?”; 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .97$ ). We also assessed perceptions of status affirmation (Drèze & Nunes, 2009), and (un)due privilege (Goor et al., 2020). Afterwards, participants reported their selectivity perceptions using the scale from Experiment 2 ( $r = .88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, participants completed the PES ( $\alpha = .91$ ), the NPI-16 measure of narcissism (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006;  $\alpha = .79$ ), the PES-V

(e.g., “I demand the best because... I seem to always get the worst”;  $\alpha = .95$ ) and PES-G (e.g., “I demand the best because... I usually am the best”;  $\alpha = .94$ ) entitlement measures (Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020)<sup>10</sup>, and Rosenberg’s (1993) self-esteem scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ). See Appendix 3.F for further details on the additional measures used in Experiment 4.

### 3.6.2 Results

**Randomization and manipulation checks.** First, a randomization check verified that (unidimensional) PES scores did not significantly differ across participants in the selective and non-selective framing conditions ( $t(499) = -0.45, p = .65$ ). Second, multiple linear regression suggests that the prosocial opportunity was perceived as more selective when it was framed as selective than when it was framed as non-selective ( $B = 4.56, SE = 0.10, p < .001$ ). The coefficient of PES was not significant ( $B = -0.04, SE = 0.21, p = .160$ ). Although the selectivity  $\times$  PES interaction was significant ( $B = -0.36, SE = 0.16, p = .02$ ), floodlight analysis indicates that no significant transition points emerged. More specifically, the results suggest that the difference in selectivity perceptions across conditions diminished as entitlement increased, although the difference remained significant and in the expected direction (i.e., higher perceived selectivity in the selective framing condition) across the full observed range of entitlement scores ( $p < .001$ ). A similar pattern of the interaction (with no significant transition points) emerged when replicating this manipulation check using PES-V or PES-G.

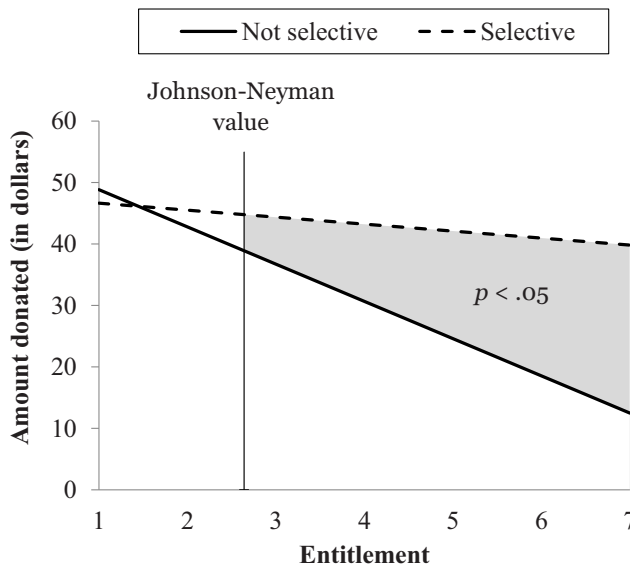
**Moderation by PES.** We next tested for moderation by (unidimensional)

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<sup>10</sup> The PES, NPI-16, PES-V and PES-G scales were positively correlated ( $r$ 's varying between .37–.77, all  $p$ 's  $< .05$ ; see Appendix 3.G).

entitlement. The coefficients of selectivity ( $B = 7.75, SE = 2.89, p = .01$ ) and entitlement ( $B = -3.58, SE = 1.08, p = .001$ ) were significant. Furthermore, the interaction between entitlement and selectivity was significant ( $B = 4.92, SE = 2.17, p = .02$ ; Figure 3.4). Floodlight analysis indicates that the effect of selectivity (vs. non-selectivity) on amount donated was significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive for entitlement scores at or above 2.64 ( $M - 0.28 SD; B = 5.90, SE = 3.00$ ; 55.7% of the sample). Thus, we replicate the positive conditional effect of selectivity on prosocial behavior among entitled consumers.

**Figure 3.4** Amount donated as a function of selectivity and entitlement in Experiment 4



Importantly, regressing selectivity, narcissism, and their interaction on amount donated yielded a non-significant selectivity  $\times$  narcissism interaction ( $p = .88$ ; see Appendix 3.H). Moreover, the selectivity  $\times$  entitlement interaction remained significant after controlling for both narcissism and the selectivity  $\times$  narcissism interaction (see Table 3.2). The now significant selectivity  $\times$  narcissism interaction

suggests that narcissism and entitlement act as each other's suppressors, evidently explaining unique variation in prosocial behavior. The results also hold after controlling for self-esteem (see Appendix 3.I).

**Table 3.2** Multiple linear regression results when controlling for narcissism in Experiment 3

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	40.74	1.44	28.23	0.00
Narcissism	-0.60	0.59	-1.01	0.31
Selectivity × narcissism	-2.51	1.17	-2.14	0.03
Selectivity	7.96	2.89	2.76	0.01
Entitlement	-2.51	1.39	-1.81	0.07
Selectivity × entitlement	8.83	2.78	3.18	0.00

Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

**Moderation by PES-V and PES-G.** We subsequently tested for moderation by PES-V (replacing unidimensional PES). Both the coefficients of selectivity ( $B = 8.25$ ,  $SE = 2.89$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and PES-V ( $B = -3.98$ ,  $SE = 0.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant. Furthermore, the interaction between PES-V and selectivity was significant ( $B = 3.98$ ,  $SE = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Floodlight analysis indicated that the effect of selectivity on prosocial behavior was significant ( $p < .05$ ) and positive for PES-V scores at or above 2.08 ( $M - 0.38 SD$ ;  $B = 6.06$ ,  $SE = 3.08$ ; 55.5% of the sample). Thus, framing the opportunity as selective (vs. non-selective) significantly increased amount donated among those high in PES-V. We also replicated the multiple linear regression with PES-G as the moderator. The coefficients of selectivity ( $B = 7.83$ ,  $SE = 2.91$ ,  $p = .008$ ) and PES-G ( $B = -2.74$ ,  $SE = 0.99$ ,  $p = .006$ ) were both significant. However, the interaction between PES-G and selectivity was *not* significant ( $B = 1.73$ ,  $SE = 1.99$ ,  $p = .39$ ).

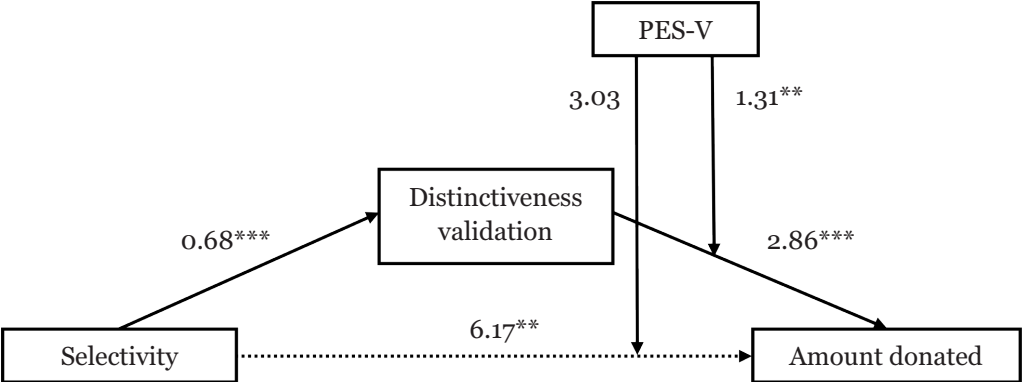
**Moderated mediation.** Thus far, we found that the positive conditional effect

of selectivity among entitled consumers is specific to high *vulnerable-based* entitlement. We therefore next tested a moderated mediation model using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018, model 15, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with selectivity as the independent variable, distinctiveness validation as the mediator, vulnerable-based entitlement as the moderator, and amount donated as the dependent variable (Figure 3.5).

First, we tested whether selectivity affected the mediator—distinctiveness validation—and confirmed that the coefficient of selectivity was significant ( $B = 0.68$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $p < .001$ )—framing the opportunity as selective (vs. non-selective) indeed validated participants' distinctiveness. The second part of the model (i.e., the dependent variable model) revealed a significant and positive effect of distinctiveness validation on amount donated ( $B = 2.86$ ,  $SE = 0.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The distinctiveness validation  $\times$  PES-V interaction was also significant ( $B = 1.31$ ,  $SE = 0.53$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Distinctiveness validation significantly ( $p < .05$ ) and positively influenced amount donated for PES-V levels at or above 1.86 ( $M - 0.53 SD$ ;  $B = 1.84$ ,  $SE = 0.94$ ; 63.7% of the sample). As before, the coefficient of selectivity was significant ( $B = 6.17$ ,  $SE = 2.89$ ,  $p = .03$ ). However, the previously significant selectivity  $\times$  PES-V interaction was reduced to non-significance after including the mediator in the model ( $B = 3.03$ ,  $SE = 1.99$ ,  $p = .13$ , cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986; Muller et al., 2005). The index of moderated mediation excluded zero (index = 0.88,  $SE = 0.42$ ,  $CI_{.95} = 0.15, 1.80$ ). The indirect effect via distinctiveness validation was significant for high ( $M + 1 SD$ ) PES-V ( $CI_{.95} = 1.45, 5.37$ ), but not for low ( $M - 1 SD$ ) PES-V ( $CI_{.95} = -1.06, 2.51$ ). Thus, the indirect effect significantly differed depending on vulnerable-based entitlement; those high in PES-V respond positively to a selective framing that validates their distinctiveness, whereas those low in PES-V are not significantly influenced by such a distinctiveness validation. These effects remained robust after controlling for self-esteem or narcissism (see

Appendices 3.I–J). Finally, additional moderated mediation analyses confirm that these effects are not replicated when using competing mechanisms such as status affirmation and (un)due privilege; only the model with distinctiveness validation evidenced moderated mediation (CI<sub>.95</sub> excluded 0; See Appendix 3.K).

**Figure 3.5** Moderated mediation in Experiment 4



Notes. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

\*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**3.7 Meta-Analysis Across All Experiments**

The overall interaction between selectivity and entitlement on prosocial behavior was significant in Experiments 1, 2, and 4, but was only marginally significant in Experiment 3. To further confirm that our experiments support our proposition that selectivity increases prosocial behavior among those high in entitlement, we performed a meta-analysis as a more powerful assessment of the effect (Maner, 2014; McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). Specifically, following established procedures (Mittal et al., 2015; Rosenthal, 1991), we converted the two-tailed  $p$ -values of the interaction effect into one-tailed  $p$ -values and converted these into  $z$ -standardized significance levels and a



combined weighted  $z$ -score, weighting each study by its degrees of freedom (see Table 3.3). Using the same weighting, we also calculated an overall effect size. The results revealed a significant selectivity by entitlement interaction across experiments,  $r = .11$ ,  $z = 3.89$ ,  $p = .001$ . Across experiments, the pattern of the interaction robustly demonstrates a positive conditional effect of selectivity on prosocial behavior among entitled consumers.

**Table 3.3** effect size ( $r$ ), standardized  $Z$  significance levels of interaction effect, and degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) per experiment (meta-analysis)

Experiment	$r$	$z$	$df$
1	0.15	2.21	211
2	0.13	2.01	245
3	0.10	1.66	287
4	0.10	2.27	497

### 3.8 General Discussion

In this research, we merge work on entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004), selectivity (Homburg et al., 2008), and prosocial behavior (Brunell et al., 2014) by providing evidence that selectivity boosts prosocial behavior among entitled consumers. Those high in entitlement—consumers who typically feel that they deserve more than others—donate more time and money when they are offered a selective donation opportunity than when they are offered a non-selective opportunity. Our results rule out that the effects are driven by self-esteem and narcissism. Hence, the effects are limited to entitlement and do not extend to broader, related constructs that represent high self-regard. We offer a theoretical account for the effects based on vulnerable-based entitlement (Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020) and distinctiveness validation (White & Argo, 2011).

We find that the interplay with selectivity is particularly associated with the

more deprived, vulnerable facet (rather than the grandiose facet) of entitlement. This finding confirms prior notions that accounting for the various forms of entitlement is critical to understand its dynamics (Hart, Tortoriello, & Breeden, 2020). Vulnerable-based entitlement is characterized by justifications for special treatment based on appeals to past deprivations and hardships rather than appeals to superiority (Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020). Selective prosocial opportunities may particularly appeal to those high in vulnerable-based entitlement because more unique opportunities form an advantageous compensation for their felt deprivation. We speculate that the interaction effect may not extend to grandiose-based entitlement because the focus here is on a selective and *prosocial* opportunity. Grandiose-based entitlement relates to agentic (vs. communal) values, which feature low prosocial affect, whereas vulnerable-based entitlement does not (Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020). When the focus of the selective appeal offers more status and agentic benefits, which may typically be the case with exclusive loyalty programs or commercial offerings, the effects may also be stronger among those high in grandiose-based entitlement.

We offer specific process evidence by demonstrating that selectivity increases prosocial behavior among those high in vulnerable-based entitlement by validating their distinctiveness. Being selected for an opportunity to donate, unlike others who are not selected, makes consumers feel validated as a unique individual. This validation in turn increases donations among those high (but not those low) in vulnerable-based entitlement. This finding is in line with earlier evidence on entitled consumers' high need to express their distinctiveness (Campbell et al., 2004; Zitek & Vincent, 2015) and illustrates that this may also be expressed through donation behavior. We rule out two alternative mechanisms by demonstrating that there was not a significant effect via consumers' felt status affirmation or feelings of (un)due privilege.

Together, the current findings suggest that charitable organizations could successfully apply selectivity practices in order to promote prosocial behavior among entitled consumers. The results also offer practical implications for other societal challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Applying selectivity—for example via an opportunity to use unique soap or facemasks—might be the answer to Zitek & Schlund’s (2021, p. 6) call to “examine how to get entitled and unentitled people to comply with the health guidelines”. In a broader consumption context, our finding that entitled consumers respond particularly positive to selective offers could also inform the design of commercial offers and loyalty programs. As selective offers and programs set entitled consumers apart from other consumers, these offers validate their distinctiveness, which may lead to increased purchase behavior and enhanced customer relationships, among others.

Tailoring to consumers’ entitlement would require organizations to measure it. Apart from relying on validated measures such as the PES, organizations could also rely on indicators of social class (given its positive correlation with entitlement; Piff, 2014) or on salient behavioral expressions of entitlement such as aggression, impatience, or large claims of common goods (Campbell et al., 2004; O’Brien et al., 2011).

### **3.9 Future Research Directions**

This research offers valuable directions for future research. For example, building on our initial evidence on the mediating role of distinctiveness validation, future work could further examine the underlying process, which may vary across trait (forms of) entitlement and state entitlement. We did not find evidence for status affirmation or perceptions of (un)due privilege as alternative mechanisms. A related phenomenon that could drive responses to selectivity, especially among those low in

entitlement, is *tainted altruism* (Newman & Cain, 2014): charitable opportunities are evaluated worse when they additionally offer a self-benefit. Additionally, the effects could be driven by differences in skepticism, as past research indicates that selectivity can raise concerns about the organization's ulterior motives (Eggert et al., 2015; Main et al., 2007). These accounts may particularly explain the pattern of results found in Experiments 1–2, which hint at a (small) *negative* effect of selectivity among low entitlement consumers. If those low in entitlement indeed donate less when offered a selective prosocial opportunity, this may be due to tainted altruism or skepticism.

Second, whereas we focus on the robust conditional effects of selectivity across entitlement levels (i.e., the robust increase in prosocial behavior among those high in entitlement), our findings indicate that the conditional effects of entitlement across selectivity conditions vary between experiments. Future research could explore what drives these differences. For example, consumer entitlement may influence prosocial behavior differently (both in the presence and the absence of selectivity appeals) when this sense of entitlement is relatively salient or when the behavior is highly unpleasant or costly. Relatedly, selectivity may not always boost entitled consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the level of those low in entitlement. We hypothesize selectivity may create greater compliance among entitled (vs. non-entitled) consumers when presented with a more self-benefiting selective offer, such as a desirable product or service, compared to other-oriented, prosocial opportunities. However, regardless of the relative boost, the consistent finding that selectivity boosts compliance among entitled consumers offers valuable implications, as various alternative interventions were unsuccessful (Strong & Martin, 2014; Zitek & Schlund, 2021).

Third, future research could investigate any potential caveats of offering entitled consumers selective benefits. For example, prior literature suggests that entitlement exaggerates expectations and causes cognitive distortions (Grubbs & Exline, 2016;

O'Brien et al., 2011). Entitlement is also characterized by a self-reinforcing nature (Grubbs & Exline, 2016; Fisk, 2010). It may therefore be that entitled consumers gradually or situationally become insensitive to selectivity, or that selectivity fuels consumers' perceived entitlement. These notions would especially be relevant when our results generalize from prosocial behavior to other behaviors. It intuitively makes sense that selective loyalty programs and exclusive discounts also appeal more to entitled consumers, whereas these may be ineffective, or even backfire, among consumers low in entitlement. Prior findings also describe potential dark sides of selectivity (Eggert et al., 2015), and future research could further investigate when selectivity positively or negatively impacts more and less entitled consumers.

Finally, future research could explore factors other than selectivity appeals that may increase compliance among entitled consumers. For example, given that agentic goals motivate (grandiose-based) entitled consumers (Brunell et al., 2014; Hart, Tortoriello, & Breeden, 2020), entitled consumers may be more willing to engage in prosocial behavior when it offers potential for self-enhancement (e.g., when it is public). Whereas our prosocial tasks were all private, future research could explore how performing the behavior in public (vs. private) influences the relationship. Given that a sense of entitlement seems ubiquitous in today's society, future research could fruitfully explore these and other directions.