Cultural Identity and the Antecedents of Risky Decision-Making: Am I Good Or Lucky?

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Previous literature has found that lucky experiences have a paradoxical effect on expectations of future performance. These results are quite similar to findings in the self-esteem literature concerning ego-threat. This research investigates whether cultural identity explains differences in sensitivity to luck and self-esteem using a risky decision task. We believe cultural identity matters in this domain since it determines control orientations. Two studies show that cultures with an internal locus of control engage in more risky decision-making when self-esteem is enhanced. On the other hand, cultures with an external locus of control make more risky choices when they believe that they are personally lucky.

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SESSION OVERVIEW

This session demonstrates when and how cultural identity affects how consumers make decisions, respond to consumption situations, and react to persuasive communications. The rationale behind cultural identity-based research is that exposure to different ecological factors and social structures perpetuates different cultural values and ideals and thus certain judgment “biases” are likely to be more prevalent in one culture than another (Triandis 1995). The lack of systematic research in this domain has left us with little understanding of why such an identity variable may matter. This session provides a theoretical understanding of these phenomena using existing models of information processing.

All papers draw from experimental findings to demonstrate how cultural identity affects consumers’ decision-making (1st paper), persuasion (2nd paper), and choice (3rd paper). However, each paper differs in the insights it provides on these effects. The Valenzuela, Darke and Briley paper documents and explains why consumers of different cultural identities (here American vs. Chinese) also differ in how they make decisions. The focus is on differences in control orientations that lead to different sensitivity to luck and in turn impact decision-making. The Briley and Aaker paper demonstrates the boundaries of how cultural identity affects persuasion and judgment by studying the conditions affecting consumers’ reliance on cultural versus personal knowledge when forming judgments. Finally, the Russell and Russell paper documents the potential for cultural identity prompts to activate animosity toward another culture and in turn affect consumer choices, thus demonstrating that cultural identity salience can be manipulated and in turn affect choice.

Collectively, these papers provide a coherent message about these beliefs that are universally held and have an impact on memory, motivation, decision making and performance. Angela Lee, the discussion leader, draws from her research in the area of cross-cultural consumer behaviour to synthesize the findings of the different papers and develop an agenda for future research. Moreover, her insights help underscore how theoretical research can advance our understanding of different judgment and decision biases.

“Cultural Identity and the Antecedents of Risky Decision-Making: Am I Good or Lucky?”
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Previous literature has found that lucky experiences have a paradoxical effect on expectations of future performance (Darke and Freedman 1997). Subjects who thought luck was a personal, stable factor reacted to a lucky event with higher expectations for performance, while those who perceived luck as completely random had lower expectations following initial luck. As a consequence, beliefs in good luck may buffer people from feelings of uncertainty and enhance risk taking. These results are quite similar to findings in the self-esteem literature concerning ego-threat (e.g., Baumeister et al.1993). In fact, self-esteem has been shown to predict risk-taking particularly in the domain of gains (Josephs, Larrick, Steele and Nisbett 1992). However, respondents’ cultural identity is expected to moderate these effects. People have implicit theories about whether behavior is driven merely by an individual’s ability (internal locus of control) or by situational forces (external locus of control). Individual responses to success or failure are likely to differ depending on the theory to which they subscribe. Individuals that believe in external locus of control may be more likely to shift their expectations for future performance depending on whether they are lucky or not (Hong and Chiu 1988). Research by Weisz, Rothbaum and Blackburn (1984) indicates that East Asians tend to exhibit more external locus of control than North Americans. Additionally, Heine and Lehman (1997) also identified cultural differences in self-esteem maintenance for Japanese vs. North Americans. They found that many self-esteem related effects such as post-decisional dissonance occur with North Americans but not with Japanese. As a consequence, we expect that individuals who subscribe to different implicit theories of behavior (North American vs. Chinese) will differ in their sensitivity to luck and self-esteem in risky decision-making. In other words, people seem to use important dimensions of their self-concept as a buffer against different kinds of threats—in this case the risk of getting no money when taking a chance on winning a larger sum of money. Self-affirmation on the dimension of ability should be more effective in buffering the risk of the gamble in western cultures while self-affirmation on personal luck should be more effective in buffering risk in the eastern cultures. Three studies investigate this proposition.

In Study 1, we use a risky decision task to analyze whether cultures differ in their sensitivity to luck and self-esteem. Subjects were asked to choose between an option with a certain outcome and another option (or prospect) with a probabilistic outcome. Despite differences in the level of risk involved, the expected outcomes were the same for both options. In addition, decisions pertained to either gains or losses, depending on the decision frame. For example, a positively framed decisions would give subjects a choice between a sure gain of $30 and an 85 percent chance to gain $45; whereas a negatively framed decision would give subjects a choice between a sure loss of $30 and an 85 percent chance of losing $45. We ran the study using undergraduate students from both Canada and Hong Kong. Subjects completed a set of 10 decisions (5 with a gain frame and 5 with a loss frame) presented on a computer screen. The order was randomized by subject. The alternatives in each decision differed only in terms of the amount of risk involved. When subjects chose a risky option, the final outcome was determined using a lottery procedure. There was also an initial luck manipulation: Half of the subject got $5 from the start while half had to participate in a lottery to win them (although everyone won). We measured Beliefs in Good Luck (Darke and Freedman 1997) and self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965).

Results show that neither self-esteem nor beliefs in luck affect behavior in loss domains for either culture. People seem to be so averse to losses that individual differences are just not that important. In other words, loss aversion seems to be universally felt, though gain pursuit was not. In the gain domain, Canadian (but not Hong Kong) respondents chose the risky option more often when they rated high on self-esteem. Also in the gain domain, Hong Kong (but not Canadian) respondents chose more risky options when they had stronger beliefs in good luck. Only in Canada did the initial luck manipulation interact with self esteem: High self-esteem subjects
took more risks after winning the initial lottery. In the case of Hong Kong, the initial luck manipulation did not interact with individual’s beliefs in good luck. Instead, those who believed in luck tended to take more risks regardless of context induced by initial luck.

Study 2 replicated Study 1’s design (without the initial luck manipulation) and added a between-subjects priming manipulation. U.S. Caucasian and Hong Kong undergraduate students were primed to think either about their good luck or their strong ability by describing a situation in which they were either lucky or skillful. The results showed that U.S. Caucasian respondents that were primed to think about their skill tended to choose more risky options than those that were primed about luck. Respondents that had to describe a skill-based situation felt that they were describing something more important about themselves than those that described a high ability situation. In the case of Hong Kong students, luck-beliefs priming did not enhance the effect of individual’s beliefs in good luck, which again support the idea that beliefs in good luck are not as context-dependent as individual self-esteem.

In sum, our results support the idea that cultures differ in the way people deal with uncertainty in everyday life (Weisz, Rothbaum and Blackburn 1984). North Americans tend to believe in their own capability to control the situation. As a consequence, they are willing to make more risky decisions when a positive event enhances their self-esteem. In contrast, Asian cultures tend to assess the favorability of the situation and take more risk when they believe their personal good luck will put the situation in their favor. In addition, the effects of self-esteem on risk taking seem to be more context-dependent than beliefs in good luck. Further study in risky domains that are skill-based instead of luck-based would bring more light to this research question.

“When Does Culture Matter? Effects of Personal Knowledge on the Correction of Culture-based Judgments”
Donnel A. Briley, University of Sydney
Jennifer Aaker, Stanford University

You need a new computer. You log onto the Web and spend time thoughtfully perusing various vendor sites to determine the best fit for your needs. You think you’ve made up your mind. But then you’re whizzing down the highway and pass a billboard touting a different computer. You only have a few seconds to absorb the advertising message, but you’re swayed in ways you hadn’t anticipated. What’s going on? According to new research, it may have to do with your cultural biases. Or, to be more specific, the instances in which culture matters—and the times it doesn’t.

When does culture influence consumer purchasing decisions? Four experiments reported in this research show that culture-based differences are found when information is processed in a cursory and spontaneous manner. So when you passed that roadside billboard, you were likely to be influenced by advertising that appealed to values held in high regard in your particular culture. But when you had the time to deliberate more—such as examining information on the Web—attempts by advertisers to rely on cultural factors are less likely to be successful.

For example, in a pilot study, students at a California university with an ethnically diverse population (both Anglo and Asian Americans) were asked to view advertisements for Welch’s grape juice. Some participants were instructed to give their immediate reactions to the advertisements, while others were told to think more carefully before evaluating the effectiveness of the ads. Half of the ads were “promotion” in their appeal-focused on the benefits that could be gained by drinking the juice (e.g., higher energy levels, great-tasting as well as energizing, fun to drink). The other ads had preventive appeals, highlighting problems that could be avoided by drinking Welch’s (e.g., the risk of some cancers and heart disease, helps keep arteries clear so that blood can flow freely, and is healthy to drink).

The results were instructive. When participants gave their immediate reactions to the advertisements, Asian American participants heavily favored the prevention messages; Anglo Americans had the opposite reaction, rating the promotion messages as more effective. This tallied with the researchers’ theories that Americans, who value achievement, accomplishment, and independent thinking, would focus on the positive consequences of their purchasing decisions. On the other hand, Chinese subjects, who tend to value protection and security, and have more interdependent ways of viewing the world, were expected to concentrate on the negative consequences of their actions or decisions. All this bore out when subjects gave only a cursory glance at the ads. Yet, importantly this disparity disappeared when participants engaged in more thoughtful deliberations. There were simply no significant differences in how the two groups rated the effectiveness of the advertising when asked to be more careful in their evaluations. So what determines whether culture matters? A key factor is the extent to which you draw upon cultural versus personal knowledge when making purchasing decisions.

General cultural knowledge includes implicit theories about the world we live in that are largely shared by the members of our society. But in addition to this shared set of ideas, we also have personal knowledge that can conflict with accepted, culturally derived practices. For example, a boy growing up in China may generally accept the importance of his relationships with others, and therefore seek to keep harmony with family members. But more personal knowledge—such as being exposed to pictures of American cultural icons like Green Day or Madonna—may lead him to sometimes wear clothes that his parents don’t like. In other words, when pressured to form a quick judgment, we generally rely on cultural norms as a “default.” But when making a thoughtful deliberation, we’re more likely to engage in an internal debate, and waver. These results underscore the idea that culture simply does not exert the constant, unwavering effect on consumer judgments as previously thought.

As the perceived importance of cultural issues increases, fueled by new technologies that allow marketers to reach consumers across country boundaries, this research has important implications. Marketers are spending increasing amounts of time and effort trying to understand subtle cultural differences. But for a message to be effective, they must understand not only how to tailor a message to a particular culture, but when such cultural-values-based messages are most effective. Additionally, the finding that culture sometimes guides consumer judgments and behaviors, and at other times does not, helps to understand conflicting findings in extant research. For example, although numerous studies have found cultural differences matter significantly to consumers, in other studies such differences sometimes fail to appear. Such failures tend to offer uninteresting findings, and often remain unpublished. The present research suggests that such null effects may be due to differences in the conditions under which participants provide their responses. Researchers may also want to consider the distinction between personal and cultural knowledge. When will personal knowledge override socio-cultural norms? Answers to such questions will further illuminate the psychology of consumers across cultural contexts, and shed insight on what types of global marketing efforts may be most effective.
“Cultural Identity Salience as a Catalyst of Consumer Resistance”
Dale W. Russell, INSEAD
Cristel Antonia Russell, San Diego State University

This research explores the possibility that feelings of animosity may be latent and resistance due to animosity may occur through implicit as opposed to explicit means. In particular, the potential for cultural identity prompts to serve as catalysts of animosity is tested. Previous research suggests that consumer resistance usually requires strong awareness or deep resentment (Ger and Belk 1996). Yet, at the same time, some evidence suggests that consumers may be able to separate their feelings toward a nation from their purchasing behavior. The underlying construct of consumer resistance against products from a particular country is animosity, which reflects the “remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events” (Klein et al. 1998, p. 90) and can adversely impact the consumption of products from another country. This research compares two catalysts of animosity: an explicit experimental scenario designed to enhance or reduce animosity and an implicit catalyst, cultural identity salience (Aaker and Lee 2001; Briley and Wyer 2002). The consumer psychology literature suggests that calling people’s attention to their own cultural identity induces feelings of allegiance to one’s country and increases the tendencies to espouse values common in that culture (Briley and Wyer 2002). Thus, making one’s own cultural identity salient could increase one’s attention to products from their own country. Similarly, prompting another culture could impact resistance to foreign products but, unlike an explicit scenario designed to openly activate animosity, it might do so in a more implicit fashion. In particular, making salient a culture perceived as invasive might increase the threat of cultural incursions and render consumers more defensive and resistant to foreign products.

These propositions were tested experimentally with consumer movie choices, a context especially fitting given the threat of worldwide domination by Hollywood and the presumed cultural homogenization by the U.S. through film and television (Mathy 2000; Ger and Belk 1996). The research was conducted in France where triggering animosity toward a country perceived as invasive or detrimental to the local culture was posited to increase. It was predicted that combining a U.S. high animosity manipulation with exposure to a U.S. film synopsis would trigger resistance to American productions. This condition, making the cultural threat of Hollywood salient, was expected to activate a prevention-focus amongst French consumers (Briley and Wyer 2002), who should revert to domestic movies.

In a first study, French participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (animosity: high vs. low) X 2 (movie origin: U.S. or France) between-subjects experiment with the incentive of free movie tickets. Animosity was manipulated explicitly by having respondents read a press article about trade relations between the two countries before participating in a movie survey sponsored by either the American or the French Film Institute. The key dependent variable, movie ticket choice was an actual choice task at the outset of the study. Results showed evidence of cultural resistance: choices were equally split between domestic and U.S. movie tickets except in the high animosity-U.S. movie condition. In that condition, the majority (58.3%) selected domestic movies and fewer (31.7%) selected U.S. movies compared to the other conditions where between 39.7% and 45.1% opted for U.S. movies. As expected, preference for domestic movies increased when French consumers’ animosity toward the U.S. was heightened and they were reminded of the U.S.’s presence in their movie industry.

The second experiment relied on a cultural salience prompt as an implicit resistance catalyst. It was proposed that making another culture salient may operate similarly to the high animosity manipulation used in the first study, if that other culture is perceived as invasive or detrimental to the local culture. The study was on a 2 (cultural salience: France vs. U.S.) X 2 (movie origin: French vs. U.S.) between-subject experiment with participants randomly assigned to conditions and offered the incentive of free movie tickets of their choice. Cultural salience and movie origin were manipulated by exposing participants to a picture association task prompting their own or the other culture (Briley and Wyer 2002; Hong et al. 2000), before introducing them to either the fictional American or French Film Institute survey. As expected, the U.S. cultural prompt-U.S. movie condition triggered animosity and generated cultural resistance: participants in that condition were more likely to favor domestic movies than those exposed to a U.S. culture prompt and a French movie (82.6% vs. 55.6%). Thus, exposure to a U.S. cultural prompt and a U.S. movie synopsis served as implicit catalysts of resistance, awaking French consumers’ animosity toward the U.S. and in turn increasing their preference for French movies.

Not only do these experiments demonstrate that animosity can be manipulated and its effects on consumer behavior tested experimentally, they also extend cultural identity research by showing that making salient a culturally threatening nation can generate resistance and induce feelings of allegiance to one’s own country and its products.

REFERENCES


How do consumers make sense of new products? Consumer research has largely focused on new product interpretations based on a single categorization cue (e.g., New product is a PDA) or a single analogical cue (e.g., New product is like a PDA). However, with the abundance of new products in the marketplace that defy straightforward categorization (e.g., hybrid products), single cue based interpretation is often insufficient. Recent research in psychology posits that the “ability to combine concepts in novel ways allows us to think new thoughts and imagine new possibilities” (Costello and Keane 2001). The purpose of this session is to present ongoing research that examines how consumers combine or compare multiple concepts or categories to construct interpretations of new products.

Together, the papers provide a broad perspective on how consumers combine and align multiple concepts to derive property or relation based meanings for novel products. Further, the papers provide insights into the factors that influence the interpretations, the processes underlying the interpretations, as well as the outcomes resulting from the interpretations. The papers shed light on several new product scenarios in the marketplace ranging from instances where the new product is a combination of multiple concepts (e.g., PDA phones) to instances where the new product is compared to analogous concepts (e.g., New product is like a Jacuzzi and a Therapist).

The first paper by Moreau, Dale and Kirmani, analyzes data from two experiments to demonstrate that the similarity of concepts, the category level of the concepts (basic vs. superordinate), and the order in which the concepts are presented influence the nature of interpretations (property vs. relational) and preferences for the new product. The second paper by Rajagopal and Burnkrant, analyzes data from two experiments to illustrate that the nature of interpretation strategy primed (property vs. relational), leads to differences in the new product inferences (multiple category vs. single category). Finally, the paper by Gupta and Sen, analyzes data from three experiments to investigate how and why the distance between analogous concepts (far vs. near) used to describe the new product, influences the interpretations and preferences for it.

Under the heading of conceptual combination, psychologists have examined the cognitive processes that people engage in when trying to make sense of novel word combinations. Costello and Keane (2000) identified five classes of interpretations: relational (a relation is asserted between the two objects), property (a property of one object is asserted onto the other), hybrid (a blend of both objects), conjunctive (a combination of both concepts), or known-concept (focuses on a known-concept related to the two objects). The majority of interpretations fall in the relational or property categories, with hybrid, conjunctive and known-concept interpretations occurring only rarely. However, little research has examined the conditions under which these different interpretations occur. We hypothesize that similarity of the words, the category level of each noun (e.g., basic vs. superordinate), and the order in which the nouns are presented should influence how consumers interpret novel combinations.

Specifically, we predict that more abstract superordinate categories will enhance the likelihood of a relational interpretation while basic level categories will focus consumers more on concrete features, thereby increasing the likelihood of property interpretations. This effect should be more pronounced when the two nouns are more similar, because similarity should facilitate alignment in the comparison.

In perfect hybrids, word order should not matter (e.g., a drill screwdriver should have the same interpretation and preference as a screwdriver drill). In the marketplace, however, we expect that perfect hybrids are rare and that word order does matter. From conceptual combination theory, the header (i.e., the second word) has been shown to carry the categorization information with the modifier (i.e., the first word) providing more specific, descriptive information (Costello and Keane 2000). Even in the case of the drill/screwdriver combination or the HP/Starbucks alliance, we hypothesize that simply changing word order may change preferences via categorization processes because the word position (header vs. modifier) is likely to remain a powerful interpretation cue.

Study 1 assessed the impact of category level and noun similarity on consumers’ interpretations of conceptual combinations. The study was a mixed design with three factors manipulated between subjects: 2 (modifier category level: superordinate or basic) X 2 (header category level: superordinate or basic) X 2 (similarity: similar or dissimilar). 115 participants were presented with four novel noun-noun combinations and asked to provide two definitions for each combination. The category level of both the modifier and header were manipulated independently, with either being superordinate or basic. In addition, the relationship between the two nouns was either similar or dissimilar.

Two judges classified each definition into one of the five types. Judges also assessed the primary source of knowledge and assessed the type of information transferred from both the modifier and header to the new concept. Preliminary results indicate that the category level of the header, and the interaction between the category level of the modifier and the header significantly influenced the likelihood of relational and property interpretations. A superordinate header increased the likelihood of a relational interpretation (F=19.33, p<.0001), and this effect was enhanced when.
the modifier was also superordinate \( (F=6.87, p<.01) \). Further, when the nouns were similar, relational interpretations were less frequent \( (F=56.5, p>.0001) \). When relational interpretations declined, property interpretations increased. Overall, the incidence of pure hybrid interpretations was low. Taken together, this study provides crucial understanding of the conditions under which different types of interpretations occur. However, the nouns participants saw were different across conditions. In the next study, we hold the nouns constant across all conditions but vary the order in which they are observed. This manipulation allows for a more controlled test of the influence of position (header vs. modifier) on interpretation.

Study 2 manipulated a single factor between-subjects (word order). Participants provided their own definitions of and preferences for each novel combination as well as plausibility ratings for a fixed set of possible definitions. Half the subjects saw one set of conceptual combinations (e.g., vitamin-coffee, laptop-projector, computer-purse, purse-sock, and chair-basket), while the other half saw the same set with the words reversed. The results show that word order significantly influences a) participants’ interpretations of the conceptual combination, and more importantly for marketers, b) preferences for the combined concept.

“Conceptual Combination and Inferences about Ambiguous Products”

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A robust finding in the categorization literature has been the finding that inferences about an object are limited to a single category (Malt, Ross and Murphy 1995; Murphy and Ross 1996; Ross and Murphy 1994). For example, if an object is categorized as a cell phone, then inferences about the object will be limited to those appropriate for a cell phone and will not include any inferences from other categories. This finding suggests that people do not seem to hold multiple category inferences about single objects, i.e. they do not believe that an object can possess attributes of more than one category. However, many products that exist in today’s marketplace are ambiguous with respect to the product category to which they belong and possess attributes of multiple categories. For example, products like the Handspring Treo possess features and functionalities of a cell phone and a PDA while crossover vehicles like the Nissan Murano and Chrysler Pacifica possess features of a minivan and a SUV. Success for such products depends on a large extent on being able to convince consumers that they possess features of more than one category. Hence the finding with respect to single category inferences needs to be re-examined to suggest how multiple category inferences can be induced. The current paper therefore aims at understanding how single category inferences can be extended to multiple categories so that a single object can be perceived to possess features of more than one category.

We refer to the literature on conceptual combinations to overcome the problem of single category inferences. The literature on conceptual combinations focuses on how people interpret novel noun-noun combinations such as “whale boat”. Past research in this area has found that people predominantly interpret novel combinations in one of two ways—property interpretations and relational interpretations (Costello and Keane 2001). Under property interpretations, attributes from both nouns are transferred to the combination. For example, a whale boat could be a boat that is very large (like a whale). Under relational interpretations, thematic linkages are drawn between the two nouns and properties of only the head noun are retained in the combination. For example, a whale boat could be a boat that is used to watch whales. Property interpretations therefore lead to the presence of attributes from more than one category in a single object. Hence, we suggest that priming respondents with property interpretations (versus relational interpretations) will enable them to make multiple category inferences.

We further explore why property interpretations induce multiple category inferences and suggest that greater attention is paid to both categories under property interpretations which allows for easy retrieval of both sets of category attributes during product judgments. Under relational interpretations, greater attention will be paid to the head category’s attributes, leading to faster retrieval of only one category’s attributes during product judgments.

Two empirical studies were conducted to test our research propositions. In Study 1, we primed respondents with different interpretation strategies (property vs. relational) and exposed them to information about an ambiguous product that was labeled as either a PDA or a Camera. As expected, we find that when primed with a property interpretation strategy, respondents are able to make multiple category inferences and believe that the product will possess attributes of both a PDA and a Camera. When primed with a relational interpretation strategy however, respondents make single category inferences and believe that the product will either possess features of a PDA or a Camera but not both. Hence, property interpretations appear capable of inducing multiple category inferences.

In Study 2, we examine why property interpretations induce multiple inferences by incorporating a response time variable to measure accessibility to information about the two categories. As predicted, we find that under property interpretations, respondents exhibit no differences in speed of retrieval of information about both categories while under relational interpretations, respondents are significantly faster at retrieving information about one category as compared to the second category.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the literatures on categorization and conceptual combinations. We combine research from two different literature streams—traditional categorization theories and psycholinguistics—to examine how inferences about one category can be influenced by inferences from other categories. The finding that all product inferences are not derived solely through categorization, but also from the type of interpretation strategy used is a radical departure from traditional categorization theory findings, which predict that inferences are derived from a single category. From a managerial perspective, this research provides a better understanding of the comprehension processes of ambiguous products by consumers and suggests ways by which marketers can promote acceptance of their products.

“Learning and Liking through Comparison: The Influence of Multiple Analogies on New Product Interpretations and Preferences”

Reetika Gupta, Lehigh University
Sankar Sen, Baruch College/CUNY

Previous research in marketing and psychology (e.g., Gentner, Ratterman, and Forbus 1993; Roehm and Sternthal 2002) has asserted that analogy cues with their emphasis on structural relations communicate the core functionality of a new product effectively. However, researchers have highlighted the shortcoming of a single analogy cue by showing that in the absence of surface similarity between the new product and an analogy cue, consumers may not be able to detect the common relation between the new product and analogy cue. This shortcoming can be eliminated and the unique benefits of analogies can be realized if consumers can compare the new product to multiple analogous concepts in a synergistic manner so that the underlying benefit is illuminated. Marketers of new products, which defy straightforward categoriza-
tion (e.g., Metronaps, Forerunner) could benefit from the use of multiple analogous concepts in their communication as it helps engender superior understanding of the new product and influence preferences for it.

Stemming from the structural alignment paradigm, the theory of analogical encoding (Ferguson 1994; Ferguson and Forbus 1998) suggests that if consumers are presented with two analogous concepts, their comparison and alignment illuminates the common underlying functionality, leading to superior knowledge transfer to the new product. However, in a new product context, the nature of analogous concepts used would determine if this process indeed occurs and how the interpretations influence the preferences for the new product. We hypothesize that the distance between the two analogous concepts (far concepts: shared functionality but no shared surface attributes vs. near concepts: shared functionality and shared surface attributes) used to describe the new product will influence consumers’ interpretations and preferences for the new product.

Specifically, we predict that by comparing and aligning two far analogous concepts (e.g. jacuzzi and therapist), which have no shared attributes, consumers can identify the common alignable functionality (provides relaxation) while the use of two near analogous concepts (e.g. jacuzzi and sauna) focus consumers on the shared attributes (e.g. high temperatures) and shift attention away from the common alignable functionality.

At the same time, research has shown that the ability to categorize a product results in confidently held inferences (Gregan Paxton and Moreau 2003). Therefore, while the use of far concepts facilitates the transfer of the core functionality, the inability to categorize the new product weakens the effect of superior knowledge transfer, leading to lower preferences for the new product. On the other hand, when two near concepts are used, due to the focus on shared attributes, consumers have a tendency to categorize the new product into one of the two base categories, leading to greater preferences for the new product. We theorize that if the new product can be situated within a superordinate category (e.g. leisure product) associated with the inability to categorize is eliminated, and the gains of analogical encoding are realized by reversing the preference patterns. In other words, when the consumer is no longer uncertain about the superordinate category in which to situate the new product, the deeper inferences drawn from the far analogy cues drive the positive evaluations towards the new product.

We further shed light on the underlying process of abstraction that leads to greater preferences for the new product, in the far concept condition. Using temporal construal theory (Liberman and Trope 1998), we suggest that when the new product purchase is construed in the distant future, the effects on preferences will be stronger, as the individual is primed to think at a more abstract relational level. In contrast, when the new product purchase is construed in the near future, the effects on preferences are undermined, as the individual is primed to focus on the concrete attributes.

Studies 1 and 2 exposed subjects to scenarios where the new product was compared to two analogous concepts of varying distance (near vs. far). In Study 1, participants were presented with four replicate scenarios and asked to provide descriptions of the new product in an open-ended format, based on the pair of analogous concepts. Judges assessed, if the shared functionality and shared features were transferred to interpret the new product. As expected, the far concepts facilitated a higher transfer of the common underlying functionality, while the near concepts resulted in a higher transfer of attributes. In Study 2, participants first provided their own description, and subsequently responded to preference and certainty measures for that interpretation. The interpretation results of Study 1 were replicated. The ability to categorize provided a certainty for consumers in the near scenario resulting in greater preferences than in the far scenario. A closer analysis showed that in the near concept scenario there was a higher tendency to categorize the new product into one of the two base categories.

In Study 3, the scenarios were created based on an existing new product, and the superordinate category of the new product was provided to the participants. Further, the time construal of the new product purchase was varied (near future vs. distant future). The main effects revealed that with the elimination of the categorization uncertainty, the far concept scenario was preferred than the near concept scenario. Also, the interaction effects of time construal confirmed that the process of abstraction drives preferences towards the new product. Specifically, when primed with a distant future purchase, the far concept scenario reported a greater preference than the near concept scenario. In contrast, when primed with a near future purchase, there was no significant difference in preferences between the far and near concept scenarios.

Theoretically, these findings have implications for the theories of analogical processing and temporal construal. From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest effective means of communicating the core functionality of new products.

REFERENCES
“New Thoughts and New Possibilities”: Frontiers in Consumers’ Interpretations of New Products


SESSION SUMMARY
Consumer behavior researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the variety of nonconscious influences on behavior (e.g., Dijksterhuis, Smith, van Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2005; Chartrand, 2005; Simonson, 2005; Janiszewski & van Ossele, 2005), and it is now generally acknowledged that stimuli can affect people’s behavior without their intention or awareness. Research in this area is entering its second generation. Whereas most previous research was aimed at demonstrating that these effects occurred, more recent research is aimed at illuminating moderators for these general effects. Can the same prime have different effects on different groups of people? Can established effects be reversed? Can primes have the same effects on behavior, but operate via different mechanisms under different conditions and for different people? The present session outlines several individual difference and situational moderators of established automatic behavior effects. These moderators illustrate the boundary conditions that identify when and among whom these effects occur, but also lend evidence regarding their mechanism.

The first presentation, by Wheeler and Berger, shows that the same prime can have different, and sometimes opposite effects on choice, depending on the unique personal associations recipients have with the prime. Across three experiments and using both demographic and individual difference segmentation variables, they show that the effects of primes on choices of different groups of people can be predicted by understanding their personal prime associations. The experiments further demonstrate that the differential priming effects are mediated by the unique personal associations the recipients have with the prime.

The second presentation, by Dalton and Chartrand, examines how exposure to relationship partners affects goal pursuit. Whereas previous research has demonstrated that exposure to relationship partners leads to pursuit of the goals they have for the prime recipient, the current studies show that these effects can be reversed. The first study shows that accessibility of overly controlling relationship partners actually leads to pursuit of goals incompatible with those the relationship partner has for recipients, presumably in an attempt to restore personal freedom. The second study lends additional evidence for this account by showing that low reactance individuals pursue the goals of salient relationship partners, but high reactance individuals do not. Hence, reactance can automatically moderate nonconscious goal pursuit and can manifest both as a function of prime targets and individual differences.

The final presentation, by Smeesters, Wheeler, and Kay, examines direction of focus as a moderator of whether primes will affect behavior via perceptions of others or more directly. They hypothesized that when features promote focus on other individuals in the situation, perceptions of those individuals will be biased by activated constructs, and changes in behavior will be mediated by such perceptions. When features promote self-focus, on the other hand, behavioral changes will not be mediated by perceptions of other people. Across a series of studies, and using both manipulations and measurements of self-focus vs. other-focus, they supported these hypotheses. Their studies show that primes can generate the same effects on economic decisions, but via different mechanisms, depending on the level of other focus.

References

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS
“Same Prime, Different Effects: Segmentation in Nonconscious Behavior Influence”
S. Christian Wheeler, Stanford University
Jonah Berger, Stanford University
Segmentation has long been recognized as a critical procedure in influencing consumer behavior. The varying needs, wants, experiences, and psychological characteristics of different consumer groups require individualized marketing attempts tailored to these subsets of people. Although the need for segmentation has been widely acknowledged for traditional marketing campaigns, the importance of segmentation for more non-conscious influence attempts has not been recognized. Indeed, one part of the power of such influence techniques is the assumed potential for them to influence different people in similar ways. Because such influence techniques rely on basic associative processes, it has been implicitly assumed that stimuli should exert consistent effects across different types of people.

In the present experiments, we demonstrate that the same primes can exert different, and sometimes opposite effects on recipients, depending on the unique personal associations they have to the primed stimulus. Much as unique experiences and associations can affect responses to more deliberate influence attempts, we show that they can also affect less overt influences. Across three studies, and using both demographic and individual difference segmentation variables, we show that different subgroups of consumers exhibit predictable differences in their responses to primes. Specifically, we show that primes can significantly affect consumer choice, but that the effects differ across subgroups of individuals who tend to have different prime associations.

The first experiment used the domain of clothing shopping. Pretests indicated that men and women have different shopping associations. Whereas men tend to be more “purpose-driven” or pragmatic and efficient, women tend to be more “possibility-driven” and browse just to see what is out there. We predicted that these different tendencies, once activated, would influence participants’ subsequent choices in an unrelated task. Thus in the main experiment, men and women were randomly assigned to write about either clothes shopping or a control topic (i.e. geography).
Then in an ostensibly unrelated study they were asked to make a series of hypothetical choices, some of which between more “purpose-driven” and “possibility-driven” options (e.g., driving a direct route cross-country vs. taking the scenic route). Results indicated that the effect of the prime on subsequent choices differed based on participants’ gender; writing about shopping (versus geography) led women to make more possibility-driven choices in the subsequent context whereas it led men to make more purpose-driven choices.

The second experiment used the domain of formal events. Pretests indicated that when attending a formal event, men have a goal to dress rather similar to others, whereas women have a goal to dress rather differently from others. Thus in the main experiment, men and women were instructed to write about attending a formal event (or geography) before choosing between different products. Results again indicated different effects of the prime based on gender; women who wrote about the formal event (versus geography) subsequently chose more unique items whereas men who wrote about the formal event tended to choose more common items.

In the final experiment, introverts and extroverts were instructed to write about attending a party (or geography) before selecting different items they would like to receive in a drawing. Previous research has demonstrated that introverts and extroverts have different optimal levels of arousal. Introverts are aroused more easily than extroverts. As a result, they prefer lower-arousal situations and tend to be more easily over-aroused than extroverts. Consequently we predicted that thinking about a party would affect the subsequent choice of introverts and extraverts differently; introverts should be subsequently more likely to choose more low arousal prizes, consistent with their desire to lower arousal at parties, whereas extraverts should be less affected by the party. Results confirmed this hypothesis. Further, additional analyses showed that these different effects were mediated by the different associations (i.e. level of stimulation) that introverts and extroverts have with parties.

**“Nonconscious Relationship Reactance: When Significant Others Prime Opposing Goals”**

Amy Dalton, Duke University  
Tanya Chartrand, Duke University

Numerous empirical investigations demonstrate that goals can be activated by the environment and pursued outside of individuals’ conscious awareness and intent (for a review, see Chartrand, Dalton, & Cheng, in press). Recent research demonstrates that one environmental antecedent of nonconscious goal pursuit is “significant others.” Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) reported that filling out a questionnaire about a friend led participants to nonconsciously pursue an interpersonal goal to help others. Likewise, Shah (2003) found that subliminally priming the name of a significant other led participants to nonconsciously pursue a goal that a significant other had for them. These and other studies (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; Anderson, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996) demonstrate that unobtrusively activating significant other representations can put associated goals into operation automatically. But do individuals always assimilate to the goals they associate with significant others? Can goal contrast occur, even at a nonconscious and automatic level?

Despite the importance of preserving social relationships (Shah, 2003; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003) and the strength of social influences in general (e.g., Milgram, 1963; Rosenthal, 1985), sometimes individuals behave in opposition to social influences. For instance, when individuals feel that social forces threaten their autonomy, they are compelled to behave in oppositional ways. This motivational state and the resulting behavior have been labeled reactance (Brehm, 1966). We reason that the motivational state of reactance is not unlike other motivational states: the frequency and consistency with which one has experienced it in a particular situation will determine whether it can be nonconsciously activated. Therefore, individuals who have habitually experienced reactance while interacting with a significant other should come to have this motivational state automatically evoked upon exposure to the significant other. Following from this view, we conjecture that whether individuals’ goal pursuits automatically assimilate to, or contrast away from, their significant other’s wishes will depend on whether or not individuals perceive their significant others as threats to their personal freedoms. We test this hypothesis in two experiments.

**Experiment 1**

Embedded in a large mass testing session, students completed a Significant Others Questionnaire. In it, students indicated the first names of the people who most want them to work hard, have fun, and 8 other goals (included to hide the purpose), and then rated these people on various dimensions. Students were later recruited for the main experiment if they listed different people for the work hard and have fun goals, and if their ratings for those two people fell within the upper quartile of responses to the questions, “how much does that person trigger that motive or emotion in you?” and “how much does that person want to control you?”.

When they arrived for the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to be subliminally primed with the name of the significant other who wanted them to work hard or have fun, under the guise of a “visual acuity task.” Next, participants completed a 17-item anagram task, followed by a funneled debriefing that probed for suspicions about the experimental procedures.

We predicted that subliminal exposure to the name of a controlling significant other would produce automatic reactance, such that participants primed with the name of a controlling significant other would answer fewer anagrams correctly when that significant other wanted them to work hard compared to when that significant other wanted them to have fun. This is precisely what we found. Moreover, participants (in both Study 1 and 2) were not suspicious of the true relation between the experimental tasks or aware of the nature of the primes, suggesting that the significant other primes affected participants’ anagram performance nonconsciously. These results suggest that people who perceive a significant other as highly controlling automatically and nonconsciously reject the wishes of that significant other and instead pursue goals that oppose those wishes.

**Experiment 2**

We reasoned that people’s perceptions that their relationship partners are controlling might often be related to a more habitual tendency to believe that people in general wish to control them. Thus, rather than measuring the extent to which individuals perceived significant others as controlling, in Study 2 we measured trait reactance. In addition, we sought to examine the role of trait reactance as a moderator of the influence of significant other primes on goal-directed behavior, so we included participants who expressed reactant tendencies to varying degrees on an individual difference measure.

In the experiment, participants first completed the Significant Others Questionnaire. Next, in a so-called “divided attention task,” participants were subliminally primed with the name of the significant other who wanted them to work hard, relax, or an 8-letter string that did not resemble a word (control condition). Participants then
completed a 28-item anagram task, the 11-item Hong Refined Reactance Scale (Hong, 1992; Hong & Faedda, 1996), and finally, a funneled debriefing.

We predicted that trait reactance would moderate the effect of significant other priming on goal-directed behavior. As predicted, in response to significant other primes, low reactant participants pursued the goals their significant others had for them, while high reactant participants pursued opposing goals. Our results also showed that trait reactance was associated with perceptions of control: high reactant participants rated their significant others as more controlling than did low reactant participants. Therefore, although the triggers of reactance varied from other people (in Study 1) to individual differences in reactance (in Study 2), the data suggest that the mechanism underlying automatic reactance in both studies is the perception of significant others as threats to autonomy.

**Conclusion**

Our research demonstrates that it is possible for people to reject the wishes of significant others and engage in behaviors that directly oppose significant others’ wishes, all without conscious intention or awareness. We have identified two triggers of this effect, both based on perceptions of control: (1) significant others perceived as controlling, and (2) individuals chronically high in reactant tendencies, who tend to see others as controlling. Both triggers result in automatic and nonconscious reactions against significant others’ wishes.

**References**


with unkind-related concepts or neutral concepts. In addition, participants were assigned to either the high or low other-focus condition. This was manipulated by using a translation task developed by Davis and Brock (1975), in which participants guess the meaning of foreign words using either first-person pronouns or third-person pronouns. We measured each participant’s impression of their interaction partner as well as their level of cooperation in their allocation.

Results supported our hypotheses. In the low other-focus condition, the primes affected level of cooperation, but not impressions of the interaction partner. Participants were less cooperative when primed with the unkind words, but their impressions of their interaction partner were unaffected. In the high other-focus condition, the primes affected both level of cooperation and impressions of the interaction partner. Participants were less cooperative when primed with the unkind words, and they also perceived their interaction partner to be less kind. Mediation analyses showed that their allocations were mediated by their perceptions of the interaction partner. Thus, priming can both directly and indirectly affect behavior, depending on the level of other-focus.

Two additional studies replicated and extended these results using different situations (i.e., reciprocal and non-reciprocal dictator games), different primes (i.e., competition and cooperation primes), and an individual difference variable of other focus (i.e., communal orientation, Clark, et al., 1987). They illustrate that in games promoting high levels of other-focus (i.e., reciprocal dictator games), effects of primes on behavior are mediated by impressions of their interaction partner. In games with low levels of other focus (i.e., non-reciprocal dictator games), the effects of primes on behavior are not mediated by impressions of the interaction partner. They also find that the effects of the primes on behavior are mediated by perceptions of their interaction partner for individuals high, but not low, in communal orientation.

These studies show that behaviors traditionally assumed to be rational and deliberate can be non-consciously influenced by making cooperation/competition-related concepts more accessible. In support of Bargh’s (2006) plea to outline the different pathways by which primes can affect social behavior, we demonstrated that primes can affect decisions in both direct and indirect ways depending on recipients’ level of other-focus. This moderated mediation approach provides new and exciting insights into the multiple means through which accessible constructs can guide behavior as well as when each mechanism is likely to be in operation.

References
SESSION OVERVIEW

Consumer’s choices, and the satisfaction consumers derive from these choices, are often dependent on the expectations they hold. This session uses consumer expectations as a foundation for investigating the role of product assortment and variety-seeking in consumer choice and satisfaction. Building on the existing literature (Chernev 2003a; Iyengar and Lepper 1999; Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Kahn and Wansink 2004), this session investigated the role of variety and consumer expectations as they affect the choices consumers make, the satisfaction consumers derive from their choices, as well as the satisfaction consumers derive from choices made on their behalf. The session unified the findings of the individual papers into a broader framework for conceptualizing the psychological mechanisms underlying the impact of consumer expectations on satisfaction and choice in a variety of different decision contexts. Specifically, the session addressed the following issues:

Research presented by Chernev and Hamilton examines how assortment size influences consumer choice among assortments and, in particular, how assortment attractiveness moderates this process. They propose that, based on consumer expectations of the attractiveness of the options comprising the available assortments, the preference for larger assortments is likely to decrease as the overall attractiveness of both assortments increases. The data from five experiments offer converging evidence in support of this prediction.

In the second paper, research by Diehl and Poynor examines the role of consumer expectations when choosing from assortments. In particular, they argue that larger assortments raise consumers’ expectations of how well options from an assortment will fit their preferences. Higher expectations may give rise to negative disconfirmation when searching a particular assortment thus reducing satisfaction with any chosen option. Findings from three studies show that larger assortments can lead to lower satisfaction due to expectation-disconfirmation.

In the third paper, three experiments by Aggarwal and Botti investigate the role of expectations in consumer evaluations of an option from a given assortment that is self-chosen versus the same option if it were chosen for the consumer by the marketer. In particular, they argue that consumers’ satisfaction with choice is a function of their expectations about the motivations driving the marketers’ decision. These motivations, in turn, are inferred using the norms guiding the consumer-marketer relationship; satisfaction will be lower in the context of exchange relationships, which are based on the principle of quid pro quo, than in communal relationships, which are based on the principle of mutual concern for well-being.

At the end of the session, the discussion leader, Barbara Kahn, led a research dialogue to integrate the individual presentations into a more general framework. In doing so, she engaged the audience participants in a discussion aimed at facilitating a broader understanding of the role of consumer expectations in shaping preferences and satisfaction.

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

“The Too Much of a Good Thing? Option Attractiveness and Assortment Choice”
Alexander Chernev, Northwestern University
Ryan Hamilton, Northwestern University

On a daily basis, consumers are faced with decisions that involve choosing among sets comprised of multiple options, such as choosing among the assortments offered by different retailers. These assortments may vary in size, defined by the number of available alternatives. Assortments may also vary in terms of the attractiveness of the options of which they are comprised. In this research, we examine how assortment size influences consumer choice among assortments and, in particular, how assortment attractiveness moderates this process.

Most prior assortment research has focused on understanding consumer decision processes associated with making choices from a given assortment (Hoch, Bradlow, and Wansink 1999; Kahn and Wansink 2004; Schwartz et al. 2002; for a review see Broniarczyk forthcoming). Relatively little research has examined how consumers make choices among assortments prior to selecting a particular option from one of the available assortments. In particular, the extant research on choice among assortments has focused on issues such as the role of preference uncertainty (Kahn and Lehmann 1991), choice set structure (Gournville and Somar 2005; Sood, Rottenstreich, and Brenner 2004), and decision focus (Chernev 2006). The question of how the attractiveness of the options comprising the available assortments influences consumer preferences for these assortments has remained largely overlooked by prior research.

Building on the notion that choice among assortments is a function of the balance of their advantages and disadvantages, we propose that the choice of an assortment is a function of the relative attractiveness of the options comprising the available assortments. In particular, we argue that when choosing among assortments, consumers aim to minimize the cost-benefit tradeoffs associated with selecting a particular assortment. Thus, on the benefit side, consumers expect larger assortments to offer a greater variety of options, which increases the probability of a better fit between a consumer’s preferences and the available choice alternatives. On the cost side, consumers choosing from larger assortments might expect to expend greater cognitive effort in evaluating choice alternatives and have greater difficulty in making a choice.

In this context, we argue that the expected advantage of the larger assortment with respect to the smaller one is greater when assortment attractiveness of both assortments is low rather than when it is high. This proposition is based on the concavity of the value function, which implies that an increase in an object’s value on a particular attribute will be associated with a decrease in this attribute’s marginal utility, and, as a result, the perceived difference between two alternatives will decrease with the increase of the options’ overall attractiveness.

The validity of this prediction is tested in a series of five empirical studies. The first experiment examines the impact of option attractiveness on choice among assortments by asking participants to choose between large or small assortments in a
variety of different consumer situations. This experiment documents that smaller assortments are more likely to be chosen when the attractiveness of the options in both sets is high rather than when it is low. In fact, the data show not only a decrease in the relative share of the larger assortment, but in some cases, also a preference reversal in which the choice share of the smaller assortment was actually greater than that of the larger assortment. Building on these findings, the second experiment lends further support to the experimental predictions by showing that the predicted relationship between attractiveness and assortment choice by matching the items in the choice sets with participants’ previously revealed subjective preferences. The data from this experiment are consistent with the findings from experiment 1.

The third experiment directly tests the cost-benefit theory of the impact of option attractiveness on assortment choice by examining how the magnitude of the difference in the sizes of the larger and the smaller assortments moderates the impact of assortment attractiveness on choice. We argue that when choosing among assortments comprised of more attractive options (relative to assortments comprised of less attractive options), the marginal benefits of the extra options present only in the larger assortment are likely to be smaller, weakening the preference for the larger assortment. Experiment 3 tests this prediction by asking participants to choose between either more attractive or less attractive assortments of varying sizes. To illustrate, in this experiment, some participants chose between assortments of 9 and 18 options (small relative size difference) and other participants chose between assortments of 9 and 54 options (large relative size difference). The data show that not only was the smaller assortment more likely to be chosen when both assortments were comprised of relatively attractive options, but also that this effect was more pronounced when the relative size difference between the assortments was greater.

The fourth experiment examines how decision focus moderates the impact of option attractiveness on choice among assortments. Prior research has argued that the cognitive costs associated with choices from larger assortments are likely to be more salient when consumers shift their focus from the task of choosing an assortment to the task of choosing an item from the selected assortment. The results indicate that the assortment attractiveness effect reported in the first two studies is stronger when consumers are asked to justify their choice of an item from the selected assortment than when they are asked to justify their choice of an assortment.

In order to gain more insight into the decision processes underlying the observed effects, the fifth experiment examines respondents’ information-search patterns. The results are consistent with the other experiments and show that the impact of assortment attractiveness on choice also extends to search behavior: participants were more attracted to larger rather than smaller assortments only when the attractiveness of the available assortments was low; when assortment attractiveness was high, the pattern of initial preferences was reversed in favor of smaller assortments.

This research demonstrates that choice among assortments is a function of the perceived attractiveness of these assortments, such that the relative preference for larger assortments is likely to decrease as the overall attractiveness of both assortments increases. In fact, the data show not only a decrease in the relative share of the larger assortment, but in some cases, also a preference reversal in which the choice share of the smaller assortment was actually greater than that of the larger assortment.

“A Great Expectations?! Assortment Size, Expectations and Satisfaction”
Kristin Diehl, University of Southern California
Cait Poynor, University of South Carolina

A long line of research demonstrates that consumers value greater selection (e.g., McAlister and Pessier 1982) and that they react negatively to restrictions imposed on their selection (e.g., Fitzsimons 2000). However, researchers have demonstrated that consumers can experience too much choice. This stream of research shows that larger selections decrease purchase likelihood (Iyengar and Lepper 2000) as well as decision confidence (Chernev 2003b) and proposes choice overload and heightened decision complexity as the underlying drivers.

We demonstrate an additional downside of larger assortments, lowering satisfaction with the chosen option, and establish the underlying mechanism causing this effect. We suggest that larger assortments raise consumers’ expectations of the degree of preference match they can achieve. Higher expectations can lead to greater disconfirmation when searching an assortment, thus reducing satisfaction with the choice. Findings from three studies show that larger assortments can lead to lower satisfaction due to expectation-disconfirmation over and above the effects of information overload.

Study 1 used a principal-agent task where participants imagined choosing a birthday card for a male coworker (see Diehl, Kornish, and Lynch 2003). Participants imagined going to a store that featured a selection of either 25 or 250 birthday cards (between subjects). All participants then saw the same, single option, pretested to be perceived as a good option. Participants were told they had chosen this card and were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the card as well as the extent of expectation-disconfirmation they experienced. Replicating prior findings, participants were less satisfied with the target card when this card ostensibly came from the larger as opposed to the smaller assortment. Moreover, the larger assortment led to significantly greater negative disconfirmation than did the smaller assortment, and expectation-disconfirmation mediated the effect of assortment size on satisfaction.

Study 2 replicates the mediating effect of expectation-disconfirmation in a real choice situation, where participants actually experienced different assortments sizes. Study 2 asked participants to search and choose computer wallpaper for themselves. Before searching the assortment, participants indicated one of six categories from which they expected to choose. Participants wrote a brief description of their imagined wallpaper and also sketched a picture. Assortment size was manipulated between-subjects as either small (60) or large (300 wallpapers), with 10 or 50 wallpapers per category. Participants saw a list of all options, grouped by categories and identified by category and a number. Clicking on an option brought up a small thumbnail of the wallpaper. Participants searched as long and in any order they wanted. After choosing an option, they viewed their choice full screen, rated their satisfaction with the choice, choice difficulty, and their degree of expectation-disconfirmation.

Contrary to prior work on choice overload, assortment size did not affect perceived choice difficulty, perhaps due to the visual nature of the stimuli. Still, we statistically control for choice difficulty. Replicating study 1, participants were less satisfied if they chose from the larger assortment. Further, larger assortments led to greater expectation-disconfirmation than did smaller assortments and expectation-disconfirmation mediated the effect of size on satisfaction. Study 3 further teases apart the overload mecha-
nism from the expectation-disconfirmation mechanism we propose. We manipulate assortment size as well as the order of questions assessing satisfaction and overload. An overload account would suggest that asking participants to assess overload prior to rating satisfaction would prompt them to attribute at least parts of their negative state to the experience rather than the outcome, thus attenuating the negative effect of assortment size on choice satisfaction (Schwarz and Clore 1983). Our proposed mechanism, however, would predict no differential effect of question order on satisfaction: whether overload was assessed a priori or not, expectation-disconfirmation should still drive differences in satisfaction.

We test these predictions using a principal-agent task that asked participants to select a camcorder for work. Participants browsed a catalogue of 8 or 32 (between subjects) camcorders and made their selection. Participants either rated their satisfaction with their choice before rating how overwhelmed they felt or vice versa. As before, larger assortments decreased satisfaction with the chosen option, and here also increased feelings of overload. However, there was no interaction of size and question order, suggesting that asking about process dissatisfaction first did not alter outcome satisfaction. Further, assortment size had a significant effect on expectation disconfirmation, which in turn mediated the effect of size on satisfaction.

Recently, researchers have challenged the ideal that more choice is always desirable. Our work contributes to this stream by identifying an additional psychological mechanism triggered by choice abundance. By increasing consumers’ expectations of what should be available and therefore what will be considered acceptable, consumers may grow more demanding and may become frustrated in an environment that seemingly offers a lot of choices, but still does not live up to their expectations.

“Do I Like It if You Choose for Me? The Influence of Relationship Norms on Consumer Satisfaction”
Pankaj Aggarwal, University of Toronto
Simona Botti, Cornell University

Prior research has demonstrated that personally-made, as compared to externally-dictated, choices lead to greater task enjoyment, superior cognitive performances, and more positive affect (Brehm 1966; Festinger 1957; Langer 1975; Taylor and Brown 1988). Recent research, however, has found that cultural and social norms regulating interpersonal exchanges may moderate these beneficial effects of self-choice. The present research hypothesizes that the norms underlying different types of relationships between marketers and consumers moderate consumers’ satisfaction with a self-chosen outcome relative to a marketer-chosen outcome. This hypothesis draws on recent research suggesting that consumers’ responses to the marketer’s actions are a function of the relationship norms between the two (Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998). Two types of consumer-marketer relationships are examined: communal and exchange (Mills and Clark 1982). In a communal relationship, people give benefits to relationship partners due to a concern for their well-being. Thus, if in a communal relationship the marketer makes the choice, it is expected that it would have acted in the best interest of the consumer; consequently, the consumer is likely to be satisﬁed with this choice. Conversely, an exchange relationship is based on the principle of quid pro quo. People know that beneﬁts are given in order to get something in return. As such, if in an exchange relationship the choice is made by the marketer, consumers will expect the marketer to be motivated by its own interests, and they will be less likely to be satisﬁed with it. We therefore hypothesize that the consumers’ satisfaction with a marketer-chosen outcome will be lower compared to a self-chosen outcome when they have an exchange relationship than when they have a communal relationship with the marketer.

Study 1 was a 2 (relationship: communal vs. exchange) x 2 (choice: self-chosen vs. marketer-chosen) between-subject design, and scenario descriptions were used to manipulate the participants’ relationship with a hypothetical bookstore. Participants were told that as part of a promotion the bookstore was giving away one of four novels to its customers. In the self-choice condition, participants selected a novel from this assortment, while in the marketer-choice condition the novel was chosen by the bookstore from the same assortment. Results showed that exchange participants experienced lower satisfaction with the marketer-chosen book than with the self-chosen book, while communal participants perceived no difference in satisfaction across the choice conditions. A thought protocol analysis provided further evidence by showing that when the choice was made by the marketer, exchange participants, relative to communal ones, expected the marketer to act more in its own interest and less in the consumers’ interest.

Study 2 was designed to replicate these results and to rule out a reactance-based alternative explanation according to which participants in an exchange relationship would evaluate the marketer-chosen outcome less positively, not because of different attributions about the marketer’s motivations but because of the greater perceived violation of their freedom to choose. To test this rival explanation, we allowed participants to either choose the novel themselves or let the marketer choose it. If the reactance account were driving the results of study 1, then we should observe a weaker or even a reverse effect in study 2, especially for participants in the exchange condition. However, if the attribution based account were the primary driver, then the results of study 2 should replicate those of study 1. Results yielded an interaction effect mirroring those of study 1 consistent with an attribution rather than a reactance explanation.

It was somewhat surprising that the exchange non-choosers experienced lower satisfaction than choosers in spite of their voluntary decision to relinquish the choice to the marketer. Could they have not foreseen this lower satisfaction, in which case they should not have relinquished their right to choose in the first place? It is likely that by providing the participants information about the four alternatives we gave them the opportunity to form ‘own’ preferences. When these preferences were not consistent with the marketer’s choice, participants may have tried to explain this mismatch by using the relationship norms. Thus, communal consumers may have interpreted the mismatch as evidence of the marketer’s knowledge of another, equally satisfying option, whereas exchange consumers may have interpreted the same mismatch as evidence of its selfish motivation.

Study 3 tests this explanation. Prior work on Deviance Regulation Theory (Blanton and Christie 2003) suggests that when people behave counter-normatively, they put greater weight on the positive features of that behavior. Given that exchange participants who gave up choice behaved counter-normatively, we expect them to evaluate the marketer-chosen alternative more positively if they cannot compare it with their own preferences. Thus, in this study we replicated the design of study 2 except that there was no information given about the four alternatives. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found a reversal of the effect for exchange non-choosers—who evaluated the final outcome more positively than exchange choosers—whereas no significant difference was observed between communal participants in the two relationship conditions. Further, this interaction was mediated by participants’ expectations about the marketer’s motivations, suggesting that these inferred attributions drove the differences.
Overall, consumers’ satisfaction with the outcome of a self-chosen versus a marketer-chosen outcome depends on the norms underlying the consumer-marketer relationship, and the resultant differences in attributions made by the consumers.

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