Choosing Variety For Shared Consumption

Jordan Etkin, Duke University, USA

Consumption experiences are often shared, yet little is known about how consumers make choices for shared consumption. This research identifies a novel factor – relationship length – that shapes such choices. Four studies demonstrate that consumers choose more variety, and prefer more varied shared experiences, when their relationships are short versus long.

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The ‘Partners-in-Crime’ and the ‘Lone Wolf’: Comparing the Unethical Behaviors of Dyads and Individuals
Hristina Dzhogleva Nikolova, Boston College, USA
Cait Poyner Lamberton, University of Pittsburgh, USA
Nicole Verrochi Coleman, University of Pittsburgh, USA

Paper #2: Choosing Variety for Shared Consumption
Jordan Etkin, Duke University, USA

Paper #3: When choosing for others is more fun (and less depleting) than choosing for the self
Evan Polman, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Kathleen D. Vohs, University of Minnesota, USA

Paper #4: Shared Decision Making and Power in Relationships
Danielle J. Brick, Duke University, USA
Tanya L. Chartrand, Duke University, USA
Gavan J. Fitzsimons, Duke University, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW
Consumers regularly evaluate choices and make decisions on behalf of and with others. Yet, relatively little is known about how consumers make these types of decisions. This session seeks to advance knowledge in this domain by examining choices and decisions made for and with others. What are some of the consequences of choosing for and with others? Are interpersonal dynamics important to consider when studying this topic? These are some of the questions this session aims to address.

The first paper by Dzhogleva Nikolova, Lamberton, and Coleman begins with a negative consequence of choosing with others: Specifically, they compare whether people behave more unethically when they make decisions in a dyad versus alone. Results reveal that people intuit that joint “crimes” (unethical decisions made with others) lead to social bonding. Therefore, dyads behave more unethically than individuals only in situations when social bonding is needed. Interestingly, results show that collaborative wrongdoing generates social bonding only for some individuals but has perverse effects for others. This paper demonstrates that joint decision-making can have negative consequences and highlights the importance of studying interpersonal dynamics in this domain.

The second paper by Etkin continues to examine the role of interpersonal dynamics, and demonstrates a neutral consequence, variety-seeking, in this domain. Specifically, she finds that perceptions of relationship length affect whether individuals prefer variety or similarity in their choices for others. When the length of the relationship seems short, individuals choose more variety and prefer more varied products and experiences to give to others. Etkin also examines willingness to pay for more or less varied products when choosing for others (e.g., bouquet of flowers), which demonstrates how aspects of the relationship affect choices made for others.

The next two papers demonstrate positive consequences of choosing for and with others in terms of ego-depletion and relationship dynamics. In the third paper, Polman and Vohs find that choosing for others is less depleting (and more fun) than choosing for the self. The authors also find that self-construal moderates the effect of choosing for others on depletion depending upon whether the decision maker is self or other-oriented. These findings highlight that self-other decision making can be explained within the theory of self-construal, and again demonstrate the importance of studying interpersonal dynamics in this domain.

In the last paper, Brick, Chartrand and Fitzsimons compare the effects of choosing with others to those of choosing for others on power and satisfaction in romantic relationships. Previous research would suggest that the person who gets to make all of the choices for their partner should have the most power in the relationship, in other words choosing for others should be associated with greater power. However, the authors find that choosing with one’s partner (i.e., shared decision making) is associated with greater power and also greater relationship satisfaction, highlighting an important, positive consequence of choosing with, as opposed to for, others.

Taken together these papers provide some initial insight into the consequences of choosing for and with others. They also demonstrate how interpersonal dynamics are necessary to consider when studying this topic. These papers will appeal to a broad audience as they highlight different theoretical frameworks and topics, e.g., morality, close relationships, self-regulation, variety-seeking, that can be studied in this domain, and, they suggest various avenues for future research.

The ‘Partners-in-Crime’ and the ‘Lone Wolf’: Comparing the Unethical Behaviors of Dyads and Individuals

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Recognizing the widespread occurrence of fraudulent behaviors and their costs to businesses, individuals, and society, researchers have examined individual and situational factors underlying individuals’ unethical behavior (e.g., Mead et al. 2009; Gino et al. 2013). However, people often solve ethical dilemmas along with others. For example, Enron’s notorious fraud was committed jointly by CEO Jeffrey Skilling and founder Kenneth Lay. Furthermore, people on sports teams, in the workplace, or in academic settings often have to make joint ethical decisions.

Despite the prevalence of such decisions, little research has examined whether people are more unethical when they make decisions jointly in a dyad versus alone. The present research takes a first step toward addressing this gap in the literature, comparing the ethical decisions of dyads and individuals.

Interestingly, the existing literature makes opposing predictions. On one hand, according to the accountability literature, which suggests that “the need to justify one’s views to others” encourages more careful and accurate decisions (Tetlock and colleagues 1983, 1987), it could be argued that decision-making in dyads will be more ethical than solo decision-making. However, research on diffusion of responsibility shows that individuals feel less personal responsibility for group actions (Leary and Forysth 1987), thus predicting that dyadic decision-making will be more unethical than will that of the ‘lone wolf.’ Further, shared risk-taking and guilt-sharing can provide bonding experiences (Lowe and Haws 2014). Thus it is possible that if individuals wish to form a social bond with others, the opportunity to make joint unethical decisions could provide an avenue. In such cases, the ‘partners-in-crime’ should display more unethical decision-making than should the ‘lone wolf.’

To test these possibilities, our first study presented participants (n=62) with two versions of a cheating scenario adapted from Shu et al. (2011). In Scenario A participants imagined that a student was given the opportunity to make up for a missed exam. The student had the option to cheat by taking a graded copy of the exam from his classmates. In Scenario B participants had to imagine that the same
Choosing Variety for Shared Consumption

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumption experiences are often shared with others. Consumers eat out with their friends, watch movies with their families, and vacation with their significant others. Indeed, more consumption experiences may be shared than not (Raghunathan and Corfman 2006; Ramanathan and McGill 2007). Despite this fact, little research has examined how people make choices for shared consumption. Consider a couple who shares multiple experiences each week. These individuals could choose to incorporate more variety into their shared experiences, or less variety into them. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night, for example, the couple could go out to eat, see a movie, and attend a concert, or they could eat at three different restaurants. What might affect how much variety they choose to share?

I propose that the length of consumers’ relationship plays a critical role by changing the emotions that they value. Research on the psychology of aging and longevity demonstrates that people’s preferences change over time (Carstensen 2006; Carstensen et al. 1999). Whereas younger individuals tend to value feeling excited, older people tend to value feeling calm (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2013; Mogilner et al. 2012). Building on this idea, I suggest that relationship length should also affect what emotions consumers value. Just as age (i.e., the length of one’s life) changes whether feeling excited or calm is desirable, relationship length should have similar effects. Relationships can be (or seem) short and new, or they can be (or seem) longer and more established. When relationships seem short (like feeling young), consumers should value excitement in their relationship. When relationships seem long (like feeling old), in contrast, consumers should value feeling calm. Evidence from a pilot study supports this reasoning, demonstrating a negative correlation between relationship length and the importance of excitement in relationships ($r = -.39, p < .01$), and a positive correlation between relationship length and the importance of calmness ($r = .26, p < .04$).

Importantly, the variety consumers choose to share with their partner should affect how exciting or calm that relationship feels. A great deal of work shows that choosing more variety increases stimulation and excitement (Berylne 1970; Kahn and Ratner 2005; Raju 1980), whereas choosing less variety reinforces a sense of stability and routine (Khare and Inman 2006; Menon and Kahn 1995; Wood et al. 2002). Thus, sharing more (less) varied experiences should make relationships feel more exciting (calm). Consequently, when relationships are (or seem) short, consumers should prefer sharing more varied experiences with their partner compared to when relationships are (or seem) long.

Four studies test this prediction. In study 1, I manipulated perceived relationship length using a response-frequency scale manipulation adapted from prior research (Etkin and Ratner 2012; Schwarz et al. 1998). Then, I invited participants to choose four consumption experiences to share with their partner over the coming week. The choice set included three options – going out to eat, watching a movie, and listening to live music – and I recorded how many distinct options participants chose. Results demonstrate more variety-seeking among shared experiences (i.e., participants chose a greater number of distinct options) when made to feel their relationship was short ($M = 2.48$) versus long ($M = 2.15$; $F(1, 51) = 4.50, p < .04$).

Building on these findings, studies 2a and 2b explore how relationship length affects consumers’ willingness to pay for variety. Following the same relationship length manipulation from study 1, male participants were asked their willingness to pay for two bouquets of roses (order randomized): one with varied colors (high va-
riety option) and one with a single color (low variety option). A 2 (relationship length) X 2 (variety) X 2 (order) repeated-measures ANOVA on log-transformed willingness to pay only revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 129) = 6.57, p < .02$). Participants were willing to pay more for the low variety bouquet when led to perceive their relationship as long ($M = .05$) versus short ($M = -.05$). Participants were willing to pay more for the high variety bouquet, in contrast, when led to perceive their relationship as short ($M = .07$) versus long ($M = -.07$).

Study 2b manipulated perceived relationship length in a different way, and then measured willingness to pay for a more versus less varied shared experience. Specifically, participants reported the length of their relationship in years and months, and then described how that was a short (long) amount of time. Next, they read a description of a cruise vacation package and were asked how much they were willing to pay for it. In the low (high) variety condition this cruise package was described as offering many similar (different) experiences. A 2 (relationship length) X 2 (variety) ANOVA only revealed the predicted interaction. When led to perceive their relationship as short, participants were willing to pay more for the high ($M = $1420.81) versus low variety package ($M = $748.34). When led to perceive their relationship as long, in contrast, participants were willing to pay more for the low ($M = $1343.42) versus high variety package ($M = $918.13).

Finally, study 3 demonstrates an important boundary condition of this effect. While perceived relationship length affects the variety chosen to share with one’s partner, it does not change variety-seeking behavior for experiences consumed alone. Relationship length thus has a unique effect on variety chosen for shared consumption. Together, these studies demonstrate that consumers’ romantic relationships exert a significant impact on the choices that they make. Consumers choose more variety, and prefer more varied products and experiences, when their relationships seem short versus long.

**When choosing for others is more fun (and less depleting) than choosing for the self**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Decades of research show that people prefer activities that provide them with opportunities to make choices. However, empirical research shows that people describe their choices as difficult, paralyzing, and exhausting. This inconsistency is called the paradox of choice, whereby people have opportunities to make more choices than ever before, yet do not seem to benefit from them, psychologically (Schwartz 2004). Still, people insist on maximizing their choice opportunities, even when these opportunities lead them to perform worse and feel worse (Botti and Hsee 2010).

Prior work has shown that an implication of making choices is in the energy that people have to put toward acts of self-control. Research has found that making choices requires self-regulatory resources that deplete with use (Vohs et al. 2008). We studied people who make choices for other people, about whom little is known in terms of their self-regulatory capacity. We were drawn to this issue because decision making is rarely solitary and often involves including and thinking about others: Parents make decisions on behalf of their children, managers make decisions that affect their employees, graduate students delegate important decisions to their professors, and those with little experience in a domain delegate choices in that domain to those with more experience.

Research has shown that people think more “happy thoughts” when they choose for others. For example, people who decide for a friend to go on a blind date tend to fantasize about the possible positive outcomes, like how exciting the date could be. In contrast, people who decide whether to go on a blind date themselves tend to imagine a pessimistic fate, like having an awful time with a boring partner (Beisswanger et al. 2003). Research has found that people’s choices for others are more idealistic and pleasure seeking than choices people make for themselves (Laran 2010; Lu et al. 2012). Along these lines people make more creative and more assertive choices for others than they do for themselves (Kennedy and Ames 2013; Polman and Emich 2011). These lines of work suggest that people display less inhibited behavior when deciding for others, precisely the kinds of behavior that people find enjoyable and fulfilling (Apfelbaum and Sommers 2009; Grant and Gino 2010).

We report three experiments that test whether choices for others are less depleting than choices for the self. We also investigate a moderator, self-construal, and test whether choosing for others is less depleting for self-oriented, as compared to other-oriented, decision makers. In study 1, 450 participants responded to ten scenarios each describing a situation in which a choice has to be made. In the first nine scenarios, we asked participants to choose for themselves or for someone else indicated in the scenarios. We also included two no-choice, neutral conditions in which we asked participants to think about how hard it would be to make the choice as if it was for the self or someone else, respectively. The tenth scenario differed from the previous scenarios in that it described a choice where participants could recommend choosing the status-quo—an indicator of depletion that has been used successfully in past research (Danziger et al. 2011).

Our results showed that there was no difference between the two neutral conditions, so we collapsed these conditions into one neutral condition, where the proportion recommending the status-quo was .35. The proportions recommending the status-quo in the conditions where participants chose for themselves and for others were .52 and .38, respectively. A chi-square test revealed a significant difference among the three conditions, $\chi^2(2, N = 450) = 10.45, p = .005$. Planned comparisons revealed that there was significantly more preference for the status-quo when participants chose for themselves than when participants chose for others (which did not differ significantly from the neutral condition).

In study 2, 195 participants responded to ten scenarios in which participants made choices for a same-sex friend or for the self, and reported their enjoyment. Next, participants were asked to drink a relatively unpleasant mixture of water, vinegar, and drink mix. We carried out a bootstrapping procedure to determine whether enjoyment mediates the relation between choice and depletion (ounces of unpleasant drink mixture consumed). Results indicated that the indirect effect was estimated to lie between -.123 and -.035, confirming that enjoyment did act as a mediator. The overall chain thus supports the prediction that choosing for others is an enjoyable pursuit, which in turn buffers against depletion.

In study 3, 312 participants completed the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis 1994) that measures participants’ self-orientation and other-orientation. Then, participants responded to nine scenarios in which participants selected a choice for a friend or for the self, and reported their enjoyment. Next, participants were asked to solve 5 unsolvable anagrams. The amount of time participants spend on the anagrams is indicative of ego depletion. We conducted a moderated mediation analysis to assess the indirect effect of choice on depletion through enjoyment at the different orientations of self-construal. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of choice among other-oriented participants ranged from 23.72 to 100.25. In addition, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of choice among self-oriented participants ranged from -73.06 to -5.99. Since neither
of these confidence intervals contain zero, we conclude that the indirect effects are statistically significant.

A broad range of behaviors has been identified to result from depletion. Depleted people behave more unethically, spend more money, and make riskier decisions—and since these findings have relied on depletion to obtain their results, an investigation that combines research on self-other decision with research on depletion is potentially fruitful. Given that people enjoy choosing for others, they are buffered against depletion, and hence they may make decisions that are, in keeping with the examples above, more ethical, tightwad, or risk-free. This possibility is encouraging for future research and our set of studies can set in motion a foundation for future work on self-other choice.

**Shared Decision Making and Power in Relationships**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Imagine three different team scenarios. In the first, you are on a team and you get to make all of the choices for the team. In the second, you are on a team and someone else makes all of the choices. And in the third, you are on a team and everyone shares in the decision making. Which scenario do you think you would feel the most power? In the present research, we find that individuals who relinquish some control and make a decision together, ironically, perceive greater power in their relationship than if they had made the decision entirely themselves. These findings suggest that shared decisions, even those as small as which soap to buy, can increase perceptions of power in the relationship.

Power can be defined as control over valued resources and the capacity to influence the behavior of others (Anderson and Galinsky 2006; Emerson 1962; French and Raven 1959; Keltner et al. 2003; Steil 1997), while resisting the influence of others over oneself (Cromwell and Olson 1975). Power in romantic relationships can similarly be thought of as the capacity to influence others, in this case partners (Huston 1985). As it stands, the existing literature makes competing predictions about whether making all of the decisions in the relationship should lead to more or less power in the relationship. Making all of the choices in the relationship should lead to greater influence over that relationship, and thereby greater power. However, making all of the choices necessarily implies that one is involved in the relationship, and Waller’s (1937) principle of least interest suggests that the person who is less involved in the relationship has more power. By not making any of the decisions one is able to remain less involved in the relationship, and maintain greater power in the relationship.

On the one hand, by making all of the choices one has influence over their partner, which is associated with greater power; yet, on the other hand, by not making any choices one is less involved in the relationship which is also associated with greater power. The best option, then, would be for an individual to perceive oneself as having influence and for the partner to show interest. This is the case in shared decision making. Therefore, our theory posits that perceiving decisions as shared, which combines an individual’s influence plus partner’s interest, should lead to the greatest perception of power in the relationship. We test and find evidence for our theory across four studies.

In our first study we investigate whether greater shared decision making is associated with greater power in the relationship. 288 individuals from an online U.S. subject pool participated in the study. Participants completed the Personal Sense of Power scale (Anderson et al. 2012; α=0.85), a filler task, and then answered the Decision Making Measure, a series of 10 items capturing different types of decisions made in the relationship. Participants were given three response options: I mainly decide, my partner mainly decides, or we decide together. We summed the number of shared responses to create a Shared Decision Score. In line with our prediction that greater overall shared decision making is associated with the most power in the relationship, a regression analysis revealed that as the number of shared responses increased, so too did perceptions of power in the relationship.

In our second study we manipulated shared decision making through a shopping recall paradigm. We hypothesized that individuals in the shared decision making condition would report the greatest perceptions of power. 290 individuals (80 men) from an online U.S. subject pool participated in the study. Participants were randomized to recall a time when either they, their partner, or they and their partner made a decision and purchased an item for they and their partner to use. Participants completed the same power measure as used before (Anderson et al. 2012; α=0.88). They were also asked to indicate how happy they currently were with their relationship on a 1 (extremely unhappy) to 10 (extremely happy) scale. In line with our hypothesis, planned contrasts revealed that individuals in the shared condition reported significantly greater power in the relationship, and also greater relationship satisfaction.

To extend the previous results, we conducted two field studies where both members of the couple participated. In the first field study, 59 couples participated in a procedure similar to study 1. We included a measure of overall relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al. 1998). Using a multi-level modeling approach, we found a significant effect for shared decision making on power in the relationship. Specifically, as partners reported greater shared decision making, they also reported greater power in the relationship. Furthermore, we found that as shared decision making increased so too did relationship satisfaction. These results suggest that increasing power and relationship satisfaction as a result of shared decision making is not a zero-sum game as both partners could report increased power as a function of greater shared decision making.

In our second field study, 44 couples were each randomized to one of the three shopping recall conditions used in study 2. We tested our process theory that sharing decisions combines self influence plus partner interest, which in turn, leads to greater perceptions of power using a six-item measure. We included a measure of relationship satisfaction as our outcome variable. We predicted that self influence and partner interest mediate the relationship between shared decision making and satisfaction. In line with our hypothesis, a multiple mediation analysis demonstrated that shared decision making was associated with greater levels of self influence and partner interest, and these two constructs mediated the relationship between shared decision making and relationship satisfaction. Altogether these findings demonstrate how important making decisions and choices with others can be. Additionally, they highlight how important the role of consumer choices, even small ones such as recent purchases, can be for relational welfare.

**REFERENCES**


