Delegating Decisions: Recruiting Others to Make Difficult Choices

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CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Although past research on preference for choice shows that people highly value freedom of choice and often choose to maintain that freedom even when it is costly, the present research demonstrates that consumers prefer to cede decision control to others when faced with difficult decisions in order to avoid regret associated with being responsible for making a bad decision. This research challenges the traditional conceptualization of surrogate usage in marketing by showing that surrogate usage is not necessarily predicated on surrogate expertise. And, this research extends the literature on choice avoidance by identifying choice delegation as a viable strategy for avoiding responsibility for a difficult choice without avoiding the decision altogether and by showing that giving consumers the option to delegate can attenuate and even reverse the tendency for consumers to walk away from difficult choices without making a purchase.

ABSTRACT

Consumers typically prefer freedom of choice, but when choices are challenging or complex, they may prefer freedom *from* choice. This research shows that people try to avoid potential regret for making a poor choice by letting others choose on their behalf, and are more likely to do so when choices are difficult. In six experiments, across a variety of real and hypothetical choices, participants were more likely to delegate when choices felt difficult, even when the potential surrogate did not have special expertise pertinent to the decision and delegation conferred no benefits beyond those of a coin flip. Anticipated regret but not anticipated disappointment predicted the tendency to delegate, suggesting that delegation stems from a desire to avoid responsibility for potentially making the wrong choice rather than the desire to simply avoid the possibility of a poor outcome. Consequently, providing opportunities for consumers to delegate choices can reduce choice deferral and increase sales.

Having the freedom to make choices for oneself is considered by many in our culture to be an inalienable right. Some have suggested that feeling in control of one's own choices is a fundamental human need (Ryan and Deci 2000). When this decision autonomy is threatened, people assert their freedom; for example, when they encounter persuasive attempts or unsolicited advice, people often respond by discounting or rejecting the recommendations (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). Perceiving a lack of decision autonomy can even threaten people's happiness, self-esteem, and physical wellbeing (Langer and Rodin 1976; Seligman 1975; Steele 1988; Taylor and Brown 1988; Usta and Haubl 2011). It is perhaps no surprise then that research on the preference for choice has found that, even when choosing exacts a toll, people prefer to choose themselves rather than have another person choose on their behalf (Botti and Hsee 2010; Botti and Iyengar 2004; Botti and McGill 2006, 2011; Botti, Orfali, and Iyengar 2009).

However, choices themselves can be as threatening as being prevented from choosing. Making choices can be emotionally and physically depleting (Botti et al. 2009; Vohs et al. 2008) and people often find themselves overwhelmed by them (Schwartz 2004). Making a bad choice can be quite costly, financially, emotionally, or otherwise. Although people often highly value their freedom of choice and prefer to maintain that freedom even when it is costly, it also seems likely that people might sometimes value freedom *from* choice, especially choices that are challenging, burdensome, or unpleasant. How do people handle choices when they do not actually want to be responsible for choosing? Past research has shown that decision-makers who are facing difficult choices postpone them, take the "easy" way out by choosing defaults or status quo options, or even avoid making a decision altogether (e.g., Anderson 2003; Luce 1998). But there are times when choosing nothing is not an option, or when walking away empty-handed is unappealing. Thus far, research on choice avoidance has largely focused on the choice and the

individual making it, rather than the broader context in which that choice is situated. Consequently, it has neglected to consider that other people can serve as a resource to a decision maker, and that delegating choices to others may be an often-utilized strategy for avoiding the burden of responsibility associated with making a decision while still providing an appealing alternative to walking away from a difficult choice without anything to show for it.

Indeed, people often employ surrogates to make decisions on their behalf. In today's increasingly service-based marketplace, surrogate industries are becoming more prevalent and are responsible for a growing volume of sales revenue. For example, according to the United States Economic Census, there were 86,000 financial planners responsible for $23 billion in revenue in 2007 as compared to 43,000 responsible for $9 billion in revenue in 1997, and 42,000 interior designers responsible for $10 billion in revenue as compared to 34,000 responsible for $5 billion in revenue 10 years earlier. Past research on surrogate usage has been mostly limited to formal transactions like these in which wealthy consumers hire professional agents—like financial planners and interior designers—to make shopping decisions on their behalf (Forsythe, Butler, and Schaefer 1990; Fuller and Blackwell 1992; Pratt 1981; Solomon 1987; Stern, Solomon, and Stinerock 1992; Stinerock, Stern, and Solomon 1991). Yet delegation is unlikely to be exclusive to these formal interactions. The present research seeks to broaden the traditional conceptualization of delegation to reflect everyday choices and choice contexts and to show that surrogate usage is not restricted to professional agents or predicated on expertise. Rather, consumers may readily recruit others in their immediate social context to make decisions so that they do not have to bear responsibility for choosing and feel at fault if the choice were to turn out poorly: they ask friends to tell them which movie they should see, waiters to recommend what entrees they should order, and salespeople to show them which products they should buy.

We hypothesize that consumers readily and voluntarily delegate decisions to other people, and that they are especially likely to do so when choices feel difficult. This research examines when consumers delegate, why they do so, and what this means for purchases and sales when delegation is or is not an option. In what follows, we review the literature on choice avoidance and consider why people might be prone to delegate when choices feel difficult. Then, we consider how providing access to potential surrogate decision makers, expert or otherwise, is likely to affect the tendency for consumers to walk away from difficult choices empty-handed.

DELEGATING DIFFICULT CHOICES

Choice difficulty has been shown to lead to a variety of forms of choice avoidance (for a review, see Anderson 2003). For one, people may postpone a decision to a later point in time, either by gathering more information, seeking additional alternatives, or simply mulling it over (Dhar 1996, 1997b; Dhar and Nowlis 1999; Luce 1998; Novemsky et al. 2007; Tversky and Shafir 1992). For example, people who considered a choice between options that were equally desirable were more likely to continue searching for alternatives than people who were presented with a choice between two options that differed substantially in desirability (Tversky and Shafir 1992). People may also avoid difficult decisions by retaining a status quo or default option (Luce 1998; Redelmeier and Shafir 1995; Tversky and Shafir 1992). For instance, they are more likely to retain a default option when they are given multiple alternatives versus just one alternative to the default (Tversky and Shafir 1992). Or at times, decision makers may avoid difficult choices by opting not to choose anything at all (Dhar 1997a; Iyengar and Lepper 2000). For example, people presented with a large array of options were less likely to purchase anything than those presented with a smaller, more manageable array of options (Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

Delegation also allows people to avoid choosing, but it differs from these previously examined choice avoidance strategies in several ways that could either detract or add to its appeal when choices are tough. On one hand, delegation might be less appealing than these other choice avoidance strategies because it involves relinquishing decision control to another person, whereas other strategies allow decision makers themselves to determine the final outcome of a decision, even if that outcome is no choice. Giving up control over a decision may be especially aversive in the face of difficult decisions for several reasons: For one, difficult decisions often involve challenging tradeoffs (Luce 1998), and people may feel that they themselves should be best equipped to made the tradeoffs that are most appropriate for them, as they know their own preferences better than anyone else. Furthermore, difficult decisions can deplete people's limited self-regulatory resources (Vohs et al. 2008), and those resources may be needed to cope with the self-esteem threat posed by ceding decision control to others (Usta and Haubl 2011).

On the other hand, delegation might be even more appealing than other methods of choice avoidance when decisions are difficult because it enables people to avoid feeling at fault if the choice goes poorly while still allowing them to get something out of the choice and even potentially profit from others' expertise or beneficence, whereas strategies such as postponing a decision or choosing not to choose require forfeiting the benefits of obtaining a chosen option. For this reason, choice delegation may provide an especially attractive option when choices are difficult but choosing is necessary or desirable. Indeed, there is some correlational evidence to suggest that people might be especially likely to delegate when choices are challenging. Tetlock and Boettger (1994) found a correlation between participants' ratings of choice difficulty and the likelihood that they would invite another party to review and potentially revise a decision they have made. Fuller and Blackwell (1992) found that, among consumers who utilized wardrobe

consultants, those who reported having the greatest difficulty in making buying decisions were most likely to let the wardrobe consultants make the final decision of what to purchase. Additionally, in the medical domain, patients who report being afraid of making the "wrong" decision were more likely to prefer that their doctors make treatment decisions on their behalf (Charles et al. 1998; Kenny et al. 1999). For these reasons, we hypothesize that, as choice difficulty increases, people will be more likely to seek decision support in the form of delegation.

H1: As the difficulty of making a choice increases, people are more likely to delegate the decision to another person.

REGRETTING CHOICES

People may be more likely to delegate difficult decisions because difficulty undermines their confidence that they will select the best option (Dhar 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Dhar and Nowlis 1999; Steffel and Williams 2015) and prompts people to seek out ways of mitigating the bad feelings they might experience if they were to choose badly (Zeelenberg 1999). Anticipated disappointment and anticipated regret both capture a person's concern in prospect that they will make a bad choice; the difference between the two is that people feel disappointment when a choice does not turn out as well as they had hoped, regardless of the cause of the failure or their hand in the choice, but they will feel regret if they bear responsibility for a less than optimal outcome (e.g., Zeelenberg et al. 2000). Anticipated regret in particular has been shown to contribute to other forms of choice avoidance: namely, it makes people more inclined to choose default or status quo options (Baron and Ritov 1994; Park, Jun, and MacInnis 2000; Simonson 1992) and increases inaction inertia (Tykocinski and Pittman 1998). It is possible that anticipated disappointment may also prompt choice avoidance, as it may lead to feelings of powerlessness and a need to escape or do nothing (Zeelenberg, van Dijk, and Manstead 1998), as well as a

lowering of expectations about how well the decision could possibly turn out (van Dijk, Zeelenberg, and van der Pligt 2003). However, although both of these anticipated emotions could encourage delegation, anticipated regret may be especially likely to prompt delegation as it provides a means of escaping regret by avoiding responsibility for a choice, whereas anticipated disappointment may be less likely to do so as resolving a decision via delegation does not eliminate (and could conceivably increase) the possibility that the choice might turn out badly.

H2: Anticipated regret, as opposed to anticipated disappointment, prompts people to delegate difficult choices.

WHO TO DELEGATE TO?

Most decision makers have a variety of people to whom they could potentially delegate: friends and family, salespeople and waiters, doctors and lawyers, even strangers on the street. Past research on delegation in marketing has focused almost exclusively on situations in which people delegate choices to more-expert surrogates, implicitly suggesting that delegation may be predicated on surrogate expertise. Common sense tells us that people should be more likely to delegate decisions to people who they perceive as knowledgeable and capable of making a good decision. And, indeed, people place more weight on advice from experts than nonexperts (Jungermann and Fischer 2005), and they are more responsive to advice from people with greater age, education, and life experience than themselves (Feng and MacGeorge 2006). Yet, the management literature demonstrates that managers often delegate decision-making and other tasks to subordinate employees who typically are less expert than the managers themselves, because it enables them, for instance, to improve time efficiency (e.g., Vroom and Yetton 1973). If decision makers are largely motivated by anticipated regret and looking to avoid responsibility for making a poor choice, they should be willing to delegate to experts and nonexperts alike,

whereas if they are driven by anticipated disappointment, they should prefer an expert surrogate, who could potentially make a better choice. We expect that although surrogate expertise may be desirable, the tendency to delegate difficult decisions may not be predicated on such knowledge.

H3: Surrogate expertise is a helpful but not necessary determinant of delegation.

CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING THE OPTION TO DELEGATE

In most shopping and other choice contexts, choosing or walking away are not typically people's only options. Rather, consumers often have the option of asking other people—friends, salespeople or other service professionals, even strangers—to help them choose. Providing consumers with surrogate decision makers to whom they can delegate may make them less likely to delay or defer purchases and other choices. For example, a consumer faced with a difficult decision between equally attractive alternatives may be less likely to decline or delay choosing or keep searching for additional alternatives if they can resolve their decision conflict by seeking decision support from someone else. In some cases, providing consumers with the option to delegate might even reverse the tendency for people to defer difficult choices. Many choices are hard to make because the options are equally appealing (e.g., Williams, Gneezy, and Armor 2015). Ironically, this should also mean that people should be happy no matter what they choose, and yet this difficulty can lead them to put off choosing or walk away entirely. For example, people are less likely to make a purchase from a large than a small array of options, despite the fact that more options should only increase the likelihood that one of those options should prove appealing (Iyengar and Lepper 2000), and they are more likely to defer a choice with options that are closer rather than more distant in appeal (e.g., Dhar 1997b), when they should be more indifferent between the options in the former case. People might be more likely to make a purchase in such cases if they have the option of ceding responsibility for choosing to another

person. Thus, providing opportunities for consumers to delegate choices may allow consumers to get the benefits of choosing without the burdens and enable businesses to reduce choice deferral and increase sales.

H4: Having the option to delegate will ameliorate the tendency to defer difficult choices.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Across six studies, we will demonstrate that consumers are prone to delegate decisions they find to be difficult, for which the chance of regretting the outcome seems higher and thus off-loading responsibility is more appealing. Delegation, like other methods of choice avoidance, allows people to avoid choosing between options and thus possibly regretting the option they chose, but unlike other methods of choice avoidance, provides the added benefit of also resolving the decision itself. Delegation can thus also benefit businesses, which may find that making a surrogate available can reduce the number of customers who find themselves unable to decide and who might otherwise walk away from a transaction empty handed.

We test the viability of delegation as a method for decision makers to resolve a decision while absolving themselves of responsibility by manipulating how difficult and thus potentially regret-provoking the choice is. In some cases, choice difficulty may arise directly from the objective properties of the choice options. For example, choices between comparably attractive options produce more choice difficulty than choices for which one alternative is much more attractive than the other (Brehm 1956; Festinger 1964; Tversky and Shafir 1992). Additionally, choices for which there are many available options tend to be more difficult than choices for which there are few options (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). The experience of choice difficulty may also be manipulated independently of the content of the choice options (for a review, see Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). A common way to do so is to alter how fluently the choice options are

perceived. For example, Novemsky et al. (2007) manipulated the experience of choice difficulty by varying the readability of the font depicting the choice options. In the present research, to show that the feeling of difficulty drives choice delegation as opposed to other factors that might be associated with any particular instantiation of difficulty, we manipulate difficulty in a variety of ways, namely, via relative attractiveness, number of alternatives, and font readability.

In experiments 1a and 1b, we test the hypothesis that consumers are more likely to delegate choices that feel difficult than choices that feel easy, and that the mere feeling of difficulty is a sufficient catalyst for choice delegation. Experiment 2 shows that expertise on the part of the potential surrogate is not a necessary determinant of delegation, revealing that although expertise is appealing, consumers will delegate difficult decisions even when only a nonexpert surrogate is available. Experiment 3 suggests that the desire to avoid responsibility for a poor outcome, rather than to simply avoid the poor outcome itself, underlies the tendency to delegate. It also shows that anticipated regret, but not anticipated disappointment, predicts delegation of difficult choices. Experiment 4 confirms that decision makers do not choose delegation in order to receive more information about the options or receive a better outcome, but simply to have the choice be made without being held responsible for it. Finally, experiment 5 shows that giving people the option to delegate reduces choice deferral and boosts sales in situations in which people are otherwise prone to walking away empty-handed.

EXPERIMENTS 1A AND 1B: DOES DIFFICULTY PROMPT DELEGATION?

We propose that, despite their general preference for making their own choices, people do at times prefer to have others choose on their behalf, and do so more often when choices feel difficult. Experiment 1a examines this hypothesis in a choice with real consequences. Students participated in a taste test of gourmet jelly beans in which they would have the opportunity to

taste and rate one jelly bean flavor. We manipulated the difficulty of this decision by presenting participants with a small or large array of jelly bean flavors from which to choose (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). Participants had the option to pick the jelly bean flavor they would taste themselves or have the experimenter choose which flavor they would taste. We predicted that participants would be more likely to ask the experimenter to choose on their behalf when presented with a large array of flavors than a small one.

To isolate the *feeling* of choice difficulty as a sufficient catalyst for choice delegation, in experiment 1b, we held constant the content of the target choice and manipulated choice difficulty superficially via the fluency of the font in which the options were described. Participants imagined choosing an entrée off of a restaurant menu; the content of the menus was identical across conditions, but the subjective ease or difficulty of the decision was manipulated superficially by printing the menus in either a clear, easy-to-read font or an ornate, hard-to-read font. We predicted that participants would be more likely to opt to have a waiter choose an entrée for them when the decision was made to feel subjectively more difficult. In this and all subsequent studies, we have reported all measures, conditions, and data exclusions. We set target sample sizes before data collection in this and all subsequent studies. We established target sample sizes such that we would have about 100-175 participants per condition depending on our estimates of the subtlety of the manipulations. Notable exceptions include studies 1b and 5, which were completed in the lab early in the research before we increased our power, in which we aimed for about 35 participants per condition.

Experiment 1a Method

Participants. Volunteers ($N = 200$) were recruited on campus at a large Midwestern university to participate in exchange for the opportunity to taste a gourmet jelly bean. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 100 participants per condition.

Procedure. Two research assistants who were blind to the hypothesis invited participants to engage in a taste test of Jelly Belly brand gourmet jelly beans. Participants were presented with a menu of jelly bean flavors and were asked, "Would you like to choose which flavor you will taste? Or, would you like for me to choose a flavor for you?" Once they had tasted their jelly bean, all participants were interviewed about their impressions of the flavor they tasted.

Choice difficulty was manipulated by presenting participants with a menu of jelly bean flavors that contained either 5 flavors (*small set* condition) or 25 flavors (*large set* condition). There were four versions of each menu: in the large set condition, the order of the flavors was varied, and in the small set condition, the subset of jelly bean flavors that was offered was varied. In a pre-test, 141 undergraduates at the same university were randomly assigned to see either the short or the long menu and were asked to rate how easy or difficult it would be to decide which one jelly bean to taste, on a scale ranging from *1 = very easy* to *10 = very difficult*. Participants indicated that it would be easier to choose a jelly bean from the small set ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 2.78$) than from the large set ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 3.14$; $t(139) = 4.23$, $p < .001$, $d = .71$).

Experiment 1a Results

We hypothesized that participants would be more likely to delegate when presented with a difficult choice between many options than when presented with a more manageable choice between fewer options. Consistent with our predictions, participants were marginally more likely to delegate the choice of which jelly bean flavor to taste to the experimenter in the large array condition (28%) than in the small array condition (17%; $\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 3.47$, $p = .06$, $\phi = .13$).

Thus, when faced with a difficult choice between a large array of options, more participants opted to delegate their choice of jelly bean to the experimenter.

Experiment 1b Method

Participants. Undergraduates ($N = 67$) at a large southeastern university participated in exchange for extra course credit. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 35 participants per condition.

Procedure. Participants examined a 12-item menu written in either an easy-to-read font, Cambria (*fluent condition*), or a difficult-to-read font, *Edwardian Script ITC* (*disfluent condition*; see appendix A for materials). In a pre-test, 40 undergraduates at the same university were randomly assigned to view the menu in the fluent or the disfluent font and were asked to rate how easy or difficult the font was to read on a scale ranging from *1 = very easy* to *10 = very difficult*. Participants rated the fluent font as easier to read ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 2.41$) than the disfluent font ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 1.65$; $t(33.59) = 5.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.69$). Once participants had examined the menu, they indicated whether they would want to: choose an entrée themselves and then name what it was, or tell the waiter which options they were considering and order what the waiter recommended.

Experiment 1b Results

Participants were more likely to delegate their choice of entrée to the waiter when the menu was written in a difficult-to-read font (42%) than in an easy-to-read font (15%; $\chi^2(1, N = 67) = 6.33$, $p = .01$, $\phi = .77$). Thus, even with a superficial manipulation of difficulty, participants were more likely to delegate when they received relevant information presented in a manner that made the decision feel difficult to make than when the identical information was presented in a format that could be processed more easily.

Discussion

Our initial experiments show that people do opt to delegate everyday choices, and they are more likely to delegate when choices feel difficult. Specifically, participants were more likely to delegate a choice of which product to sample and evaluate when faced with a difficult choice between many options than a less challenging choice between fewer options. Participants were also more likely to delegate a choice of what entrée to order at a restaurant when they were presented with a menu written in a difficult-to-read font than an easy-to-read font, even when the content of the menus was identical. Together, these experiments show that choice difficulty increases choice delegation, and that heightening the subjective feeling of difficulty is sufficient to increase delegation even when the objective content of the choices is the same.

Consumers may delegate difficult choices for a variety of reasons. Difficult decisions may feel particularly likely to turn out poorly, and people may wish to avoid possible feelings of disappointment if the choice were to turn out poorly, and they may delegate in hopes that the surrogate decision maker will have more expertise or better insight into the decision than they themselves have. However, the actual outcome may not be what is at issue, but instead the decision maker's role in it. People may wish to avoid possible feelings of regret that they might feel if they were responsible for making a poor choice, and they may delegate in order to cede decision responsibility to another person. Recall that the difference between anticipated disappointment and anticipated regret is that people feel disappointment when the outcome of a choice fails to meet their expectations, regardless of whether or not they were responsible for making the decision, whereas people feel regret when they will shoulder the responsibility for the bad decision (e.g., Zeelenberg et al. 2000).

In our previous studies, one could imagine that participants believed that the experimenter in experiment 1a or the waiter in experiment 1b might be an expert or at least know more about the options than they did. If people delegate difficult decisions primarily to capitalize on others' expertise to minimize the likelihood of a poor outcome, then people might delegate only in such decisions when the surrogate decision maker has expertise that would make him or her better capable of making a good choice. Alternatively, if delegating difficult choices enables people to avoid feeling responsible for the choice outcome, then they may delegate even when the potential surrogate is not an expert because it can still achieve this function. The next study explores whether consumers delegate even when the potential surrogate does not have special expertise pertinent to the decision. We suggest that choice delegation is not predicated on expertise and that people may delegate even to surrogates who are uninformed.

EXPERIMENT 2: DO SURROGATES NEED TO BE EXPERTS?

Presumably, people prefer to delegate choices to people with relevant expertise, asking interior designers to make décor decisions, financial advisors to make financial decisions, and doctors to make medical decisions. Experiment 2 examines whether the expectation that the surrogate will have knowledge pertinent to the choice is a necessary determinant of delegation. In this study, participants imagined trying to choose a movie to rent out of two movies that were selected to be similar in how appealing they were to the participant, or two movies that were selected so that one of the movies would be much more appealing than the other. Participants indicated whether they would choose a movie on their own or ask a friend to choose a movie for them and rent the movie that their friend selected. This friend claimed to have seen or have not seen the movies between which the participant was choosing. We expected to find that participants would be more likely to delegate to surrogates with relevant expertise than to

surrogates without expertise. More importantly, we predicted that, regardless of the surrogate's expertise, participants would be more likely to delegate when choices felt difficult than when they felt easy, choosing to transfer responsibility for such choices to someone else even when the potential surrogate did not have special expertise pertinent to the judgment.

Method

Participants. Adults ($N = 403$) were recruited via Mechanical Turk to fill out an online survey for $0.15 Amazon.com credit. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 100 participants per condition.

Procedure. Participants imagined that they were out shopping with a friend and were interested in renting a movie from a movie rental kiosk featuring foreign films. Participants were told that their friend would not be able to watch the movie with them but was with them to help with another errand. Participants were presented with 10 foreign films, all in a foreign language with English subtitles (the original language was written in italics at the end of each movie's description). Foreign films were chosen to minimize the likelihood that participants would be familiar with the movies. Indeed, 87% of participants indicated that they had not seen any of the movies. For each film, participants were provided with reformatted descriptions and images of the DVD covers that appear on Netflix. Participants were asked to rank the movies from 1 to 10, with the movie they would be most interested in seeing at the top of the list (#1) and the movie they would be least interested in watching at the bottom of the list (#10). Participants were able to click on each movie to drag and drop the movies into the appropriate order to indicate their rankings.

On the next page, participants were told, "Once you have a chance to look over the movies, you realize that the kiosk is having a busy day, and the only two movies in the foreign

film category that are currently available are these two movies." Participants in the *easy* condition were presented with their fourth- and tenth-ranked movies, and those in the *difficult* condition were presented with their fourth- and fifth-ranked movies. Participants' first-, second-, and third- ranked movies were not presented so as to avoid movies that might be more familiar to participants. In a pre-test, 25 participants from Mechanical Turk were shown both pairs of movies and, for each pair, were asked to rate how easy or difficult it would be to decide which of the two movies they would rather rent a scale ranging from *1 = very easy* to *10 = very difficult.* Participants indicated that the decision would be easier to make when the movies were ranked further apart ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 2.68$) than when they were ranked closer together ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 2.75$; paired $t(24) = 3.12$, $p = .005$, $d = 1.32$).

Once they were presented with the two movies they would be choosing between, participants who were in the *nonexpert* condition were told that, "When your friend sees you thinking about the decision, they tell you, 'I haven't seen either of these movies, but I'd be glad to help you pick one if you need me to.'" Those in the *expert* condition were instead told that, "When your friend sees you thinking about the decision, they tell you, 'I have seen both of these movies, and I'd be glad to help you pick one if you need me to.'" Finally, participants were asked to indicate whether they would want to: choose which of the two movies they would rent on their own and name what it was, or ask their friend which of these two movies they think they should rent and rent that one.

Results

Although participants were more likely to delegate to experts than nonexperts, delegation was not predicated on expertise. A logistic regression examining the effects of choice difficulty and surrogate expertise on preferences for choosing or delegating indicated that participants were

more likely to delegate to a friend when that person was knowledgeable about the choice alternatives (68%) than when they were not (42%; Wald's $\chi^2 = 29.31$, $p < .001$, Odds Ratio = 3.23). Additionally, as predicted, participants were more likely to delegate the choice to a friend in the difficult condition (66%) than in the easy condition (44%; Wald's $\chi^2 = 21.84$, $p < .001$, Odds Ratio = 2.75), and they did so regardless of the potential surrogate's level of expertise (Wald's $\chi^2 = .01$, $p = .90$, Odds Ratio = .95). See figure 1.

Insert figure 1 about here

Discussion

Although people are more likely to delegate decisions to people with knowledge of the decision options than those without, delegation does not seem to be contingent upon the expectation that the surrogate decision maker have additional information or special expertise pertinent to the choice. Participants were more likely to delegate to a friend when that person had seen all of the available movies than when they had not seen any of them. Participants in this study were also more likely to delegate a choice of what movie to rent when the options were similarly preferred than when one of the options was preferred considerably more than the other. Most importantly, the tendency for people to delegate difficult choices more often than easy ones did not depend on the potential surrogate's expertise, consistent with the notion that what makes people more likely to delegate difficult than easy decisions is avoiding responsibility rather than seeking better insight. In the next study, to further probe what prompts people to delegate difficult decisions, we directly assess anticipated disappointment and anticipated regret and examine whether they underlie the relationship between choice difficulty and choice delegation.

EXPERIMENT 3: REGRET VERSUS DISAPPOINTMENT

If a choice goes poorly, and the decision maker is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may feel bad in two ways. One is that they may be disappointed that the outcome turned out more poorly than they had hoped it would, independent of whether they chose it or not; the other is that they may feel regret that they were responsible for choosing that bad option. In this study, participants imagined the movie choice from experiment 2. To test whether anticipated regret and disappointment predict delegation, participants were asked to imagine that they had opted to choose which of the two movies to rent themselves, and to rate the degree to which they anticipated feeling regretful or disappointed if they did not enjoy the movie they chose. We expected to find that anticipated regret, i.e., expecting to feel responsible for a suboptimal outcome, would predict the tendency to delegate the movie choice, whereas anticipated disappointment; i.e., expecting to feel bad about the outcome itself, would not.

Method

Participants. Participants ($N = 299$) were recruited to fill out an online survey via mTurk for $0.25 Amazon.com credit. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 150 participants per condition.

Procedure. The experimental procedure was largely identical that of experiment 2, with the potential surrogate in all conditions being a friend who had not seen any of the available movies. After participants indicated whether they preferred to choose a movie themselves or delegate the decision to their friend, on a separate page, they considered how much regret and disappointment they anticipated feeling if the choice were to turn out poorly, namely:

> We want to know how you feel about making this choice. Regardless of whether you opted to choose yourself or ask your friend for help, now imagine that you opted to

> choose which of the two movies to rent yourself. Think about which particular movie you would have chosen. Now imagine that once you brought this movie home and watched it all the way through, you realized that you did not enjoy it very much at all. How do you think you might feel about your decision to rent this movie, rather than the other option, after you had watched it but didn't enjoy it?

To assess anticipated regret, participants were asked, "How much do you think you would regret choosing that particular movie rather than the other one?" and "How much do you think you would feel like you made a mistake choosing that particular movie rather than the other one?" on scales ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = very much.* Responses were highly correlated ($r = .85$), and were averaged into a composite measure of anticipated regret. To assess anticipated disappointment, participants were asked, "How much do you think you would feel disappointed by the movie once you watched it?" and "How much do you think you would feel like the movie was not as good as you hoped it would be?" on scales ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = very much.* Again, responses were highly correlated ($r = .77$) and were averaged into a composite measure of anticipated disappointment.

Results

It appears that concern about feeling at fault for a bad outcome is a more powerful driver of delegation than worry about the quality of the outcome itself. As before, participants were more likely to delegate their choice of movie to a friend when the available movies were closer in relative attractiveness and thus the choice was more difficult ($\chi^2(1, N = 299) = 5.73$, $p = .02$, $\phi = .14$): 69% of participants delegated when the available options were their fourth- and fifth-most preferred movies, whereas only 55% delegated when the available options were their fourth- and tenth-most preferred movies.

Participants also anticipated feeling marginally more regretful if they were to choose a movie that they did not enjoy when the available movies were closer in relative attractiveness (M = 4.10, SD = 1.79) than when they were farther apart in relative attractiveness (M = 3.71, SD = 1.89; $t(295) = 1.82$, $p = .069$, $d = .21$), but they anticipated feeling equally disappointed if they were to choose a movie that they did not enjoy regardless of the relative attractiveness of the movies ($M_{close} = 4.65$, $SD = 1.74$; $M_{distant} = 4.73$, $SD = 1.62$; $t(295) = -.40$, $p = .69$, $d = .04$).

We next performed a mediation analysis by regressing choice delegation onto our relative attractiveness manipulation and the potential mediators (anticipated regret and disappointment). Anticipated regret significantly predicted delegation ($\beta = .52$, $Z = 4.62$, $p < .001$), but anticipated disappointment did not ($\beta = -.19$, $Z = -1.63$, $p = .10$). The direct effect of relative attractiveness dropped to nonsignificance with regret and disappointment in the model ($\beta = .41$, $Z = 1.57$, $p = .12$), indicating that the mediation was full. Bootstrapping procedures (Preacher and Hayes 2008) indicated that the indirect path through regret was significant (95% CI = .003 to .54) but the indirect path through disappointment was not (95% CI = -.06 to .15). See figure 2.

Insert figure 2 about here

Discussion

The decision to delegate difficult decisions seems to be primarily driven by anticipated regret rather than anticipated disappointment. This is consistent with the notion that people delegate choices to other people when they are concerned that they might feel responsible for a less than optimal outcome. The finding that anticipated disappointment does not differ depending on how difficult the choice is speaks against the idea that participants' expectations that the

surrogate would make a better choice than they themselves could is driving the tendency to delegate. And, the finding that participants in both experiments 2 and 3 were willing to delegate to surrogates without expertise pertinent to the judgment also contradicts this interpretation. Nevertheless, in study 4, we compare delegation to seeking more information about the options, which provides a means of avoiding a poor choice outcome, or flipping a coin, which provides a means of making a decision without having to be responsible for picking a particular option, in order to further probe whether people who delegate difficult decisions are trying to avoid a poor choice outcome or whether they are trying to avoid responsibility for making a poor choice.

EXPERIMENT 4: INFORMED CHOICE VERSUS CHOICE AVOIDANCE

The tendency to delegate difficult choices could reflect a desire to learn more about the choice options, or it may stem from a desire to avoid responsibility for choosing, even if it comes without additional insight. Experiment 4 examines whether delegation is more akin to seeking additional information or simply seeking a way out of having to choose. Participants imagined choosing between two flavors of ice cream that were close or distant in appeal, with the option of one of three types of decision assistance (which they could use or not, as they wished): they were randomly assigned to have the option to delegate the choice to the server, get more information about the flavors and then choose themselves, or flip a coin in lieu of choosing. If participants are delegating to get a more informed choice, seeking more information and delegating should be both be more appealing when choices are difficult than when they are easy. If, however, participants are delegating simply so that they do not have to choose, flipping a coin and delegating should both be more appealing when choices are difficult versus easy.

Method

Participants. Adults ($N = 1044$) were recruited via Mechanical Turk to complete an online survey for $.25 in Amazon.com credit. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 175 participants per condition.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine that they came across an ice cream truck selling twelve flavors of gourmet ice cream (The ice cream flavors, images, and descriptions came from Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream [jenis.com].). Participants ranked the flavors from most appealing to least appealing by dragging and dropping the images into the appropriate order. Next, participants were told that only two of the twelve flavors were currently available. Participants in the *difficult* condition were shown their second and third ranked flavors, and those in the *easy* condition were shown their second and eleventh ranked flavors.

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of three options for seeking out decision assistance as an alternative to choosing one of the two remaining flavors themselves. Although participants in our other experiments who opted for decision support were assumed to accept that support, in this study, participants could either accept the decision support they received or reject it and purchase nothing. After all, in real life, whereas people may sometimes be bound to others' choices once they have ceded decision control to them, people often have the option of rejecting decision support if they are dissatisfied with the result. By relaxing this assumption, we were able to get a sense of the extent to which people are likely to accept decision support once they have sought it out even if they are not bound to do so.

In the *delegation* condition, participants were told, "If you are having a hard time choosing a flavor, just tell [the server] and she can choose an ice cream for you." The options for choosing were either to "choose an ice cream flavor yourself, and buy that one" or "tell the server you would like her help in choosing, and buy whatever one she chooses for you." Those

participants who opted to pick a flavor themselves were shown the ice cream they chose on the next page. Participants who delegated were shown one of the two available ice creams (chosen at random) on the next page. After they saw the ice cream that was chosen for them, they were asked whether they preferred to "purchase the ice cream the server chose for me" or "do not purchase any ice cream."

In the *more information condition,* participants were told, "If you are having a hard time choosing a flavor, just tell [the server] and she can give you more information about those ice creams." In addition to the option to choose themselves, participants were given the option to "get more information about those ice creams from the server, and then choose a flavor." Those participants who opted to receive more information about the ice creams were shown a larger picture of the two remaining flavors and a brief description on the next page. For example, the additional information about Askinosie Dark Milk Chocolate read as "Full, fruity mellow cocoa mellowed by sweet, milky cream. It's a burst of pure chocolate, as flecks melt on your palate and finish with the flavor and scent of grass-grazed milk." After they received the additional information, participants were asked whether they preferred to "choose a flavor and buy that one" or "do not purchase any ice cream."

Lastly, in the *coin flip* condition, participants were told, "If you are having a hard time choosing a flavor, customers often find it helpful to flip a coin." In addition to the option to choose themselves, participants were given the option to "flip a coin and buy whatever comes up heads." Participants who opted to flip a coin were shown one of the two available ice creams (chosen at random) on the next page. After they were shown the ice cream that came up heads, they were asked whether they preferred to "purchase the ice cream that came up heads" or "do not purchase any ice cream."

Finally, all participants answered questions about their liking of ice cream (perhaps unsurprisingly, 99% of our sample reported liking ice cream; the results below are identical if ice cream dislikers are omitted from the data) and how often they eat it (the modal response being that that participants eat ice cream a few times a month).

Results

A logistic regression examining the effect of choice difficulty and the type of decision assistance available on preferences for choosing or getting decision assistance yielded a main effect of difficulty (Wald's $\chi^2 = 18.50$, $p < .001$, Odds Ratio = 2.17). It also revealed a main effect of the type of decision assistance available (Wald's $\chi^2 = 73.74$, $p < .001$), such that participants were more likely to opt to get more information than they were to delegate (Wald's $\chi^2 = 50.66$, $p < .001$, Odds Ratio = 4.98) but were equally likely to delegate as to flip a coin (Wald's $\chi^2 = .45$, $p = .50$, Odds Ratio = 1.19).

These main effects were qualified by an interaction between choice difficulty and the type of decision assistance available (Wald's $\chi^2 = 7.49$, $p = .02$). Participants were significantly more likely to delegate a difficult choice of ice creams (13%) than an easy one (4%; χ^2 (1, N = 348) = 9.34, $p = .002$, $\phi = .16$). They were also more likely to flip a coin to make a difficult choice (16%) than an easy one (4%; χ^2 (1, N = 347) = 14.15, $p < .001$, $\phi = .20$). However, participants were slightly but not significantly more likely to get more information about pair of ice creams that were close in appeal (35%) than a pair that were distant in appeal (27%; χ^2 (1, N = 349) = 2.36, $p = .12$, $\phi = .08$). See figure 3.

Only 5 out of 1044 participants who sought decision support ultimately rejected it and declined to make a purchase, suggesting that people may be likely to accept decision support once they have sought it out even if they are not bound to do so. The only few cases in which

participants declined to purchase an ice cream after receiving decision assistance was when they got more information about their options. No one in either the delegation or coin flip conditions declined to purchase a flavor after one was chosen (at random) for them.

Insert figure 3 about here

Discussion

This study suggests that delegating difficult choices is more akin to simply seeking a way out of choosing, even if it comes without additional insight, than it is to seeking out additional information. Participants were more likely to delegate or flip a coin, but not reliably more likely to seek more information, as an alternative to choosing themselves when choices were difficult than when they were easy. These findings further support the notion that people seek out delegation as a means of making a decision without shouldering the responsibility for choosing rather than as a means of avoiding a poor choice outcome.

The desire to avoid being responsible for a poor decision might also underlie why consumers sometimes walk away from difficult decisions empty-handed. After all, one cannot be held responsible for making a bad choice if one does not make a choice at all. If this were true, then giving consumers the option to delegate might reduce or even reverse the tendency for consumers to defer difficult decisions by providing consumers with the opportunity to simultaneously avoid responsibility and obtain a chosen option. In the next study, we examine how giving people the option to delegate affects how likely they are to make a purchase and how much they might spend when they are presented with choices that are easy or hard to make.

EXPERIMENT 5: DELEGATION VERSUS DEFERRAL

Past research has shown that shoppers are sometimes less likely to make a purchase from a large array of options than from a small array of options, despite the fact that a greater number of options should only increase the likelihood that one of those options should prove appealing (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). Yet choosing or walking away are not typically people's only options. Rather, people often have the option of asking other people to help them choose. Experiment 5 examines how giving shoppers the option to delegate choices to another person, such as a salesperson, affects their purchase likelihood and spending when they are presented with choices between many or few products. In this study, participants imagined entering a gourmet tea shop with a small or large selection of teas. Some participants were asked whether they would like to purchase a tea or defer the choice until later, and other participants were asked whether they would like to purchase a tea, defer the choice, or ask the salesperson to choose for them. We predicted that participants would be equally likely to make a purchase from a small array of alternatives regardless of whether they had the option to delegate, but that participants with the option to delegate would more likely to make a purchase from a large array than participants without the option to delegate.

Method

Participants. Undergraduates ($N = 151$) at a large southeastern university participated in exchange for extra course credit. The target sample size was set a priori such that we would have about 35 participants per condition.

Procedure. Participants imagined that they were shopping at a gourmet tea shop. They were randomly assigned to see an array of 30 teas (*large set* condition) presented in a randomized order or 6 teas (*small set* condition) randomly selected from the large set. They saw an image of each tea and its ingredients, price, and popularity rating, with a checkbox alongside.

In the *salesperson-not-present* conditions, participants chose whether they preferred to: "Choose a package of tea yourself, and buy that one (If you select this option, check the box next to the ONE tea you would like to buy)," or "Pass for the time being (If you select this option, leave all boxes EMPTY and continue to the next page)." Others assigned to the *salesperson-present* condition were told, "A store employee approaches you and asks if you would like any help in choosing a tea," and were given the two aforementioned options and the additional option: "Tell the store employee which teas you are considering, and buy whichever one he/she recommends (If you select this option, check boxes next to ANY teas that you are considering)."

Lastly, participants indicated whether they liked tea and how often they drank it. Nineteen participants were excluded because they did not select the appropriate number of teas given their stated preference to choose themselves, delegate, or defer, leaving 132 participants. The pattern of results remains the same when these participants were included, as well as controlling for tea liking and drinking.

Results

Purchases. We first sought to examine the impact of set size and the presence of the option to delegate to a salesperson on whether or not participants opted to purchase tea. A purchase in this study refers to when a participant would leave the shop with a tea, either because they chose a tea on their own, or because they delegated the choice of tea to the salesperson. A logistic regression testing the effects of set size and salesperson presence on likelihood of purchase indicated that, as predicted, there was a significant interaction between set size and salesperson presence on purchases (Wald's $\chi^2 = 8.90$, $p = .003$, Odds Ratio = 11.27). Additionally, a greater percentage of participants purchased tea when a salesperson offered to help them choose (74%) than when a salesperson was not present (46%; Wald's $\chi^2 = 10.22$, $p =$

.001, Odds Ratio = 3.34). Overall, set size did not impact overall purchase rates (Wald's χ^2 = .01, p = .92, Odds Ratio = 1.04). See figure 4.

Breaking down the results by set size, although purchases did not differ based on whether a salesperson was present (61%) or not (64%) when there were few options ($\chi^2(1, N = 56) = .02$, p = .89, ϕ = .02), when there were many options a greater percentage of participants purchased tea when a salesperson was present (86%) than when a salesperson was not present (37%; $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 18.87$, $p < .001$, ϕ = .50). Breaking down the results by salesperson presence, a smaller percentage of participants purchased tea when there were many available tea varieties than when there were few when a salesperson was not present ($\chi^2(1, N = 63) = 4.22$, p = .04, ϕ = .26), but a greater percentage of participants purchased tea when there were many available tea varieties than when there were few when a salesperson was present ($\chi^2(1, N = 69) = 5.13$, p = .02, ϕ = .27, or, separating out choice, delegation, and deferral $\chi^2(2, N = 69) = 5.72$, p = .06, ϕ = .69).

Insert figure 4 about here

Estimated Overall Sales. We next examined whether set size and salesperson presence influenced estimated sales per customer. We estimated sales per customer based on either the price of the tea the participant chose, or if the participant opted to delegate the choice of tea to a salesperson, the average price of the teas in each participant's consideration set (to approximate the price of tea if a salesperson were to choose a tea at random), the price of the most popular tea each participant's consideration set (based on the actual customer ratings that accompanied the teas' descriptions), and the price of the most expensive tea in the participant's consideration set. If a participant opted to defer, this was recorded as zero.

Regardless of how sales were estimated, the addition of a potential surrogate had a greater impact on sales from a large set of teas than a small one: there was an interaction between set size and salesperson presence on sales for all three measures of sales (random choice: $F(1, 128) = 3.96$, $p = .049$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; most popular choice: $F(1, 128) = 3.72$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; most expensive choice: $F(1, 128) = 4.41$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). Additionally, estimated sales were consistently higher when a salesperson offered to help participants choose than when a salesperson was not present (random choice: $F(1, 128) = 9.07$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$; most popular choice: $F(1, 128) = 10.41$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$; most expensive choice: $F(1, 128) = 19.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$). There was no main effect of set size (random choice: $F(1, 128) = .15$, $p = .70$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$; most popular choice: $F(1, 128) = .04$, $p = .84$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; most expensive choice: $F(1, 128) = .04$, $p = .84$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$). See figure 5.

Breaking down the results by set size, although estimated sales did not differ based on salesperson presence when there were few options (random choice: $t(54) = .59$, $p = .56$, $d = .16$; most popular choice: $t(54) = .74$, $p = .46$, $d = .21$; most expensive choice: $t(53.91) = 1.45$, $p = .19$, $d = .38$, equal variances not assumed), estimated sales were greater when a salesperson was present than when a salesperson was not present when there were many options (random choice: $t(72.98) = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$; most popular choice: $t(74) = 4.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$; most expensive choice: $t(74) = 5.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.31$). Breaking down the results by salesperson presence, sales did not differ based on set size when a salesperson was not present ($t(61) = 1.61$, $p = .11$, $d = .43$), nor did they differ based on set size when a salesperson was present (random choice: $t(55.06) = 1.18$, $p = .24$, $d = .28$; most popular choice: $t(58.21) = 1.17$, $p = .25$, $d = .28$; most expensive choice: $t(67) = 1.48$, $p = .14$, $d = .36$).

Insert figure 5 about here

Discussion

Experiment 5 shows that ensuring that consumers have access to salespeople or other surrogates to whom they can delegate difficult decisions can reduce and even reverse the tendency to walk away from difficult decisions empty-handed. Participants were more likely to make a purchase from a large array of options when they could delegate the choice to another person than when they could not. And, whereas fewer participants made a purchase from a large array of options than a small array when a surrogate was not available, more participants made a purchase from a large array when a surrogate was available to them. Moreover, consumers would have spent more money when they could recruit a salesperson to help them make difficult decisions than when they had to choose on their own.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research shows that consumers cope with choices that challenge them by relying on others to choose for them. Across six experiments, participants were more likely to ask others to choose on their behalf when choices felt difficult than when they felt easy. Participants delegated both hypothetical and real choices, and delegation increased when choices felt difficult regardless of whether that feeling was because the choices themselves were more difficult (e.g., with a larger number of alternatives or with a smaller difference in relative attractiveness between the alternatives), or because the choices were processed less fluently for entirely superficial reasons (e.g., the alternatives were presented in a difficult-to-read font).

Our findings suggest that the tendency for consumers to delegate difficult choices is rooted in the desire to avoid the potential regret associated with feeling responsible for a poor choice, rather than the desire to simply avoid the possibility of a poor outcome. The degree to

which participants anticipated regretting a poor choice, but not the degree to which they expected to be disappointed by a poor outcome, predicted the tendency to delegate. Additionally, participants confronted with difficult decisions were equally likely to delegate or flip a coin as an alternative to choosing themselves, presumably because either of these strategies would allow them to avoid responsibility for making a decision; however, choice difficulty did not have the same effect on the tendency to seek more information, after which participants would still need to make and feel responsible for a final choice. Delegation persisted regardless of whether the potential surrogate was an expert or non-expert, revealing that although expertise on the part of the potential surrogate is helpful, it is not a necessary determinant of delegation.

Consequently, giving consumers the option to delegate can reduce and even reverse the tendency for consumers to walk away from difficult decisions empty-handed. Although participants who did not have the option to delegate were less likely to make a purchase when faced with a difficult choice between many alternatives than a choice between few alternatives, participants who had the option to delegate such choices to a salesperson were more likely to make a purchase and were more likely to do so when there were many options than when there were few. In fact, estimated sales per customer increased by as much as 200% when participants were given the option to resolve difficult decisions by delegating them to a salesperson.

Directions for Future Research

Our research is among the first to examine delegation in everyday contexts, leaving many open questions for future research about the extent and impact of delegation as a form of decision support. For one, to what extent might the present findings extend to advice seeking? Advice seeking can provide many of the same benefits as delegation for mitigating uncertainty and reducing the risk of making a bad choice: for example, it can provide additional information

or validation of one's inclinations. Thus, many factors that prompt delegation are also likely to prompt advice seeking. In fact, when avoiding a being disappointed by a negative choice outcome is of primary concern, advice seeking may be more attractive than delegation in that it provides many of the same benefits while still allowing people to maintain control over the final decision. However, when avoiding responsibility for making the wrong choice is of primary concern, delegation is likely to be more attractive than advice seeking because it allows people to cede responsibility for the final decision to another person. After all, incorporating advice into a decision still requires that the recipient of the advice make the final choice.

Relevant to this, does delegation actually enable people to feel less responsible for decision outcomes? It certainly seems plausible that people might feel responsible for the outcome of a decision that was originally their responsibility regardless of whether they opted to make the decision by choosing themselves or by recruiting another person to make the decision. After all, they bear the responsibility for appointing the alternate decision maker. In a follow-up study, participants ($N = 79$) who were presented with a version of the movie kiosk scenario used in studies 2 and 3 expected to feel less personally responsible if they did not end up enjoying the movie when they opted to delegate ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.22$) than when they opted to choose themselves, ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.30$; $F(1, 75) = 27.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$). Thus, at least in some cases, it seems that delegation is in fact an effective way for decision makers to reduce how responsible they feel for the decision outcomes.

The degree to which decision makers are concerned with being held responsible will likely vary depending on the decision and will likely influence people's propensity to delegate. Choices with broader impact may be especially likely to prompt delegation, such as choices that are particularly expensive or otherwise costly, with permanent consequences, or that impact

others as well as or instead of the self. In related work, we show that people are most likely to "pass the buck," so to speak, when there is the potential for being blamed for someone else's negative outcome (Steffel, Williams, and Perrmann 2015). Namely, we find that people are especially likely to delegate when choosing for others from among unattractive alternatives compared to choosing for others from among attractive alternatives or choosing for themselves regardless of the attractiveness of the alternatives. We further show that people are more likely to delegate such choices when they are identifiable as the decision maker than when they are not. And, they only delegate when they truly feel that they will no longer be held personally responsible for the other person's outcome: they only delegate when the potential surrogate is in a position to assume blame for the choice outcomes and only when the ultimate decider is another person who can assume blame versus a chance device (i.e., a coin flip) that cannot.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Understanding the conditions under which consumers are more likely to delegate choices can help marketers to better target marketing campaigns to the people who will ultimately be making the purchasing decision. Depending on who the primary decision makers are, marketers may allocate resources differently across different elements of the marketing mix. For example, a pharmaceutical company might allocate fewer resources to advertising and more resources to personal selling the more likely consumers are to delegate the choice of what drug to take to their doctors. Additionally, marketers may position their products differently when professional surrogates are the decision makers as opposed to consumers because those professionals may have a different level of expertise or a different set of considerations than consumers. For example, a pharmaceutical company may market a drug to consumers by emphasizing lifestyle benefits but market the same drug to doctors by emphasizing performance in clinical trials.

This research can also help retailers and other service providers identify and make the most of situations in which consumers are more likely to delegate choices to salespeople. Unsolicited product recommendations are discounted relative to solicited recommendations and may even evoke reactance (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). Understanding the conditions under which consumers are more likely to delegate choices can help businesses improve the quality of their customer service and the effectiveness of their salespeople by helping them lend decision support when it would be most desired. For example, retailers may better position salespeople by concentrating them around products that are difficult to differentiate or for which there are many alternatives, or in cases when decision makers are pressed for time. It also can help retailers identify opportunities in which salespeople are likely to have more influence in the decision process and can be used more effectively to move merchandise.

Despite the prevalence of choice delegation in today's marketplace and the tremendous value in being able to predict when consumers are likely to delegate, the antecedents and implications of delegation are not well understood. This present research provides new insight into the preference for choice determination by identifying regret and responsibility as determinants of whether people prefer freedom of choice or freedom *from* choice, suggesting that the anticipated regret associated with being responsible for a bad choice can overwhelm people's general preference for making their own choices. The present research contributes to an understanding of surrogate usage by identifying when consumers are most likely employ others to make decisions on their behalf and by showing that surrogate expertise is a desirable but nonessential feature of a potential surrogate. Finally, this research contributes to the choice avoidance literature in particular, and the judgment and decision making literature more broadly, by showing that individual decision making is only a small part of a larger picture and that

decisions, including the decision whether or not to decide in the first place, often hinge upon the social context and whether people have the option to delegate those choices to others.

APPENDIX A

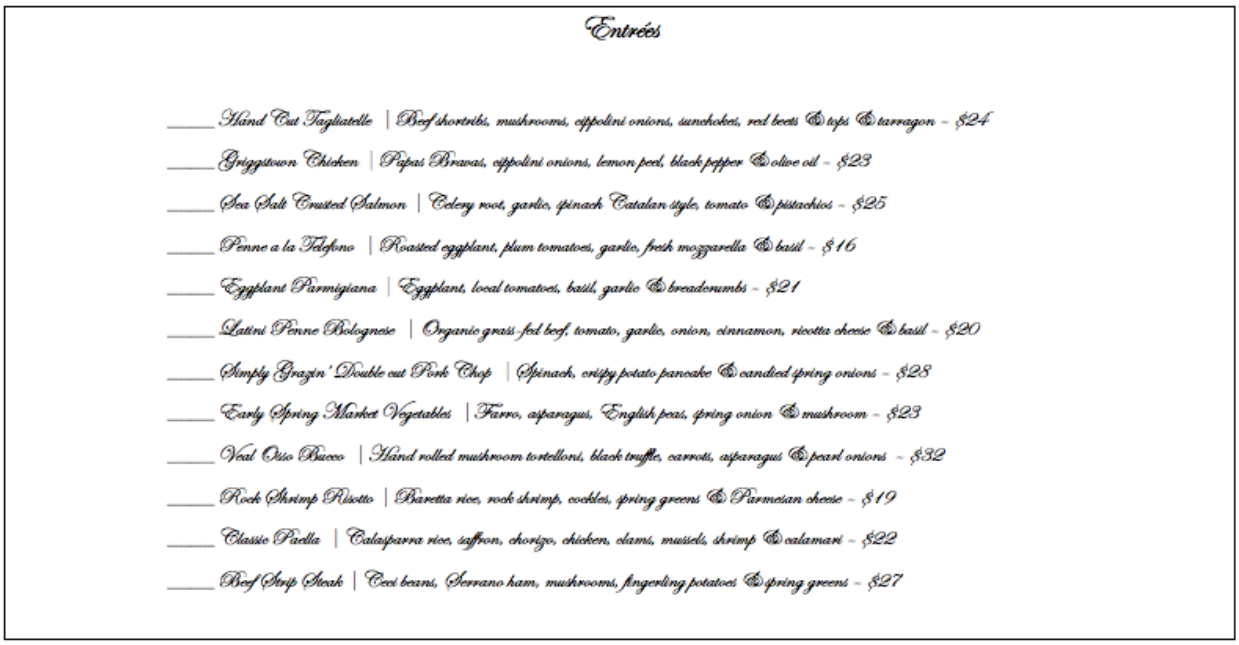
MENU OPTIONS IN FLUENT OR DISFLUENT FONT, STUDY 1B

FLUENT FONT:

Entrées

___ Hand Cut Tagliatelle | Beef shortribs, mushrooms, cippolini onions, sunchokes, red beets & tops & tarragon – $24
___ Griggstown Chicken | Papas Bravas, cippolini onions, lemon peel, black pepper & olive oil – $23
___ Sea Salt Crusted Salmon | Celery root, garlic, spinach Catalan style, tomato & pistachios – $25
___ Penne a la Telefono | Roasted eggplant, plum tomatoes, garlic, fresh mozzarella & basil – $16
___ Eggplant Parmigiana | Eggplant, local tomatoes, basil, garlic & breadcrumbs – $21
___ Latini Penne Bolognese | Organic grass-fed beef, tomato, garlic, onion, cinnamon, ricotta cheese & basil – $20
___ Simply Grazin' Double cut Pork Chop | Spinach, crispy potato pancake & candied spring onions – $28
___ Early Spring Market Vegetables | Farro, asparagus, English peas, spring onion & mushroom – $23
___ Veal Osso Bucco | Hand rolled mushroom tortelloni, black truffle, carrots, asparagus & pearl onions – $32
___ Rock Shrimp Risotto | Baretta rice, rock shrimp, cockles, spring greens & Parmesan cheese – $19
___ Classic Paella | Calasparra rice, saffron, chorizo, chicken, clams, mussels, shrimp & calamari – $22
___ Beef Strip Steak | Ceci beans, Serrano ham, mushrooms, fingerling potatoes & spring greens – $27

DISFLUENT FONT:



Entrées

_____ *Hand Cut Tagliatelle | Beef shortribs, mushrooms, cippolini onions, sunchokes, red beets & tops & tarragon – $24*
_____ *Griggstown Chicken | Papas Bravas, cippolini onions, lemon peel, black pepper & olive oil – $23*
_____ *Sea Salt Crusted Salmon | Celery root, garlic, spinach Catalan style, tomato & pistachios – $25*
_____ *Penne a la Telefono | Roasted eggplant, plum tomatoes, garlic, fresh mozzarella & basil – $16*
_____ *Eggplant Parmigiana | Eggplant, local tomatoes, basil, garlic & breadcrumbs – $21*
_____ *Latini Penne Bolognese | Organic grass-fed beef, tomato, garlic, onion, cinnamon, ricotta cheese & basil – $20*
_____ *Simply Grazin' Double cut Pork Chop | Spinach, crispy potato pancake & candied spring onions – $28*
_____ *Early Spring Market Vegetables | Farro, asparagus, English peas, spring onion & mushroom – $23*
_____ *Veal Osso Bucco | Hand rolled mushroom tortelloni, black truffle, carrots, asparagus & pearl onions – $32*
_____ *Rock Shrimp Risotto | Baretta rice, rock shrimp, cockles, spring greens & Parmesan cheese – $19*
_____ *Classic Paella | Calasparra rice, saffron, chorizo, chicken, clams, mussels, shrimp & calamari – $22*
_____ *Beef Strip Steak | Ceci beans, Serrano ham, mushrooms, fingerling potatoes & spring greens – $27*

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FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS WHO DELEGATED AS A FUNCTION OF CHOICE DIFFICULTY AND SURROGATE EXPERTISE, STUDY 2

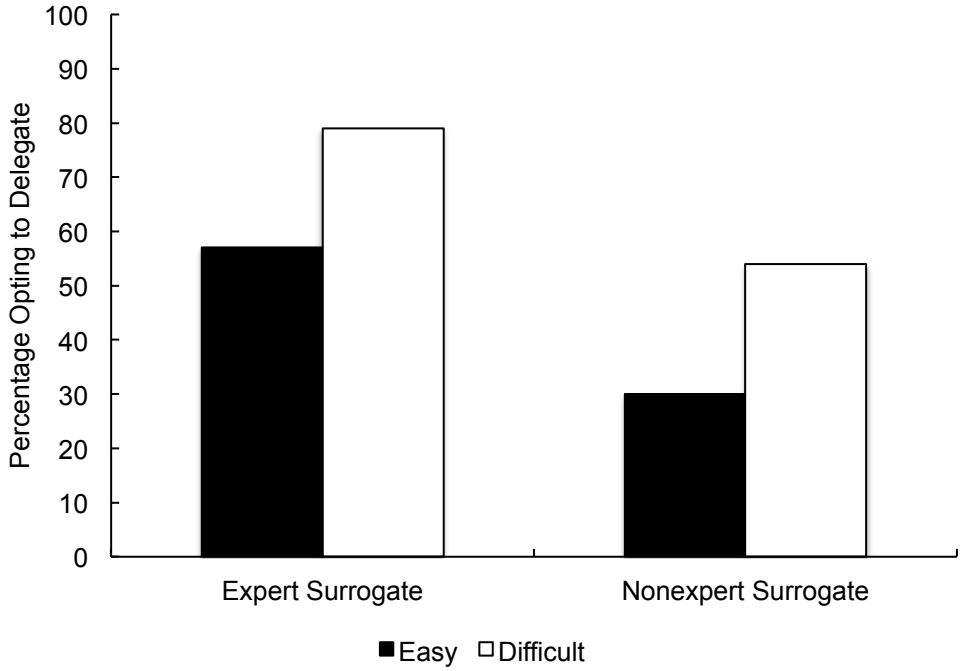

FIGURE 2

REGRET, BUT NOT DISAPPOINTMENT, MEDIATES THE TENDENCY TO DELEGATE DIFFICULT DECISIONS BETWEEN SIMILARLY PREFERRED OPTIONS, STUDY 3

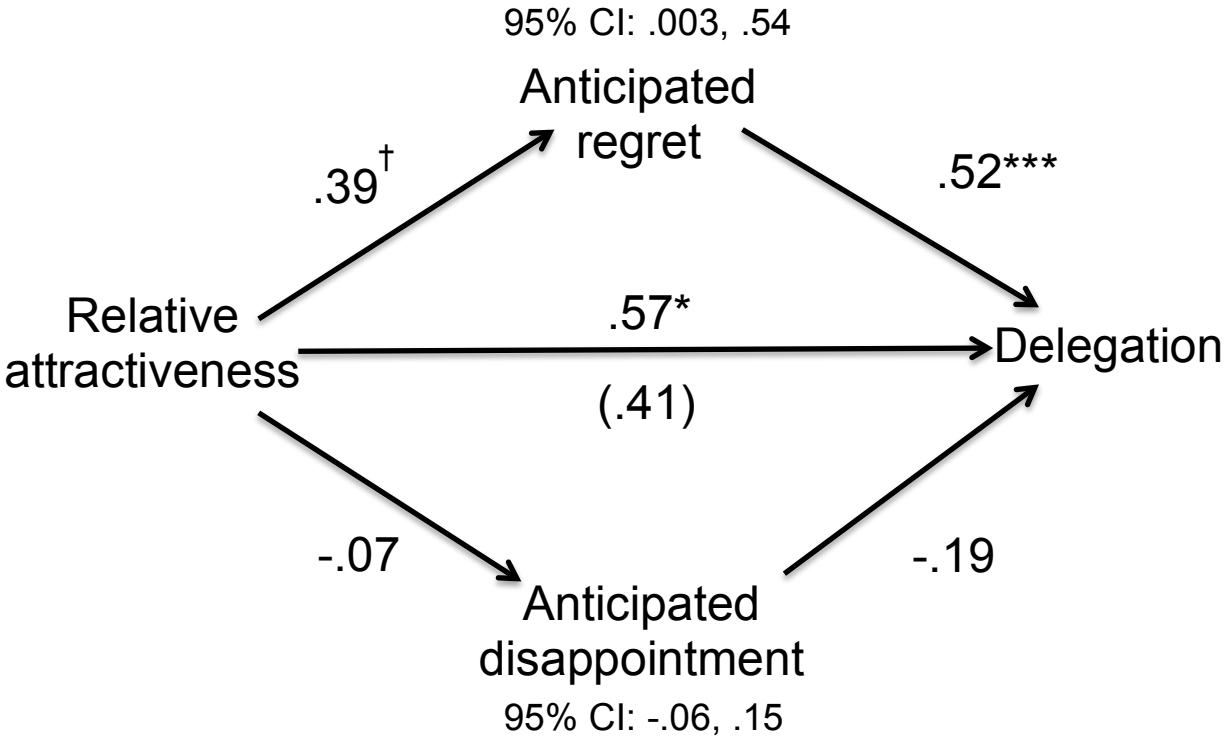

FIGURE 3

PREFERENCE FOR DECISION SUPPORT AS A FUNCTION OF CHOICE DIFFICULTY AND ALTERNATIVE TO CHOOSING ONESELF (DELEGATION, MORE INFORMATION, COIN FLIP), STUDY 4

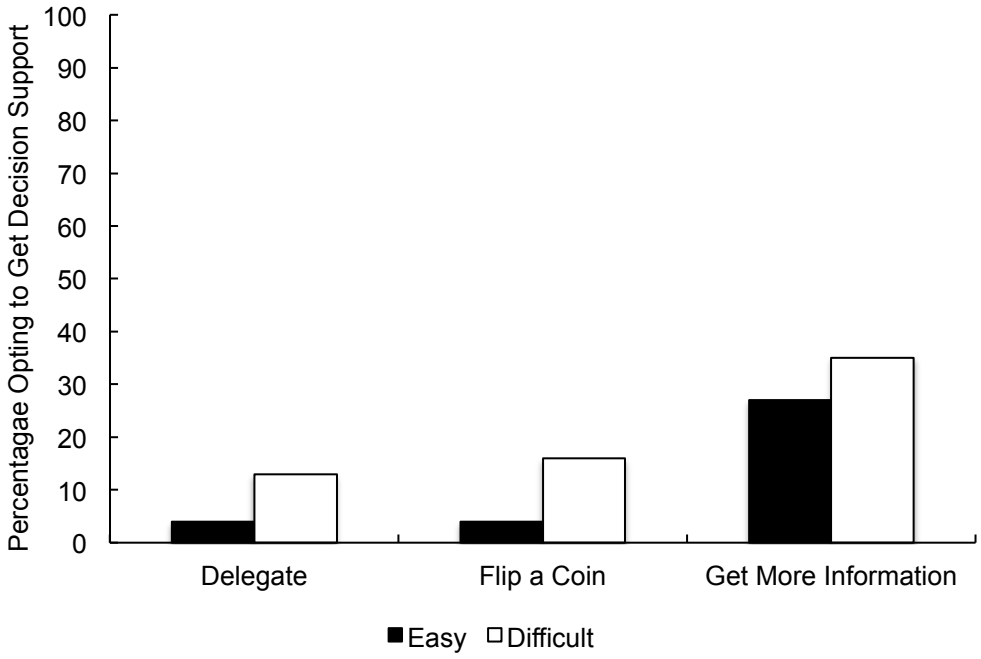

FIGURE 4

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS WHO PURCHASED TEA BY SET SIZE AND PRESENCE OF THE OPTION TO DELEGATE TO A SALESPERSON, STUDY 5

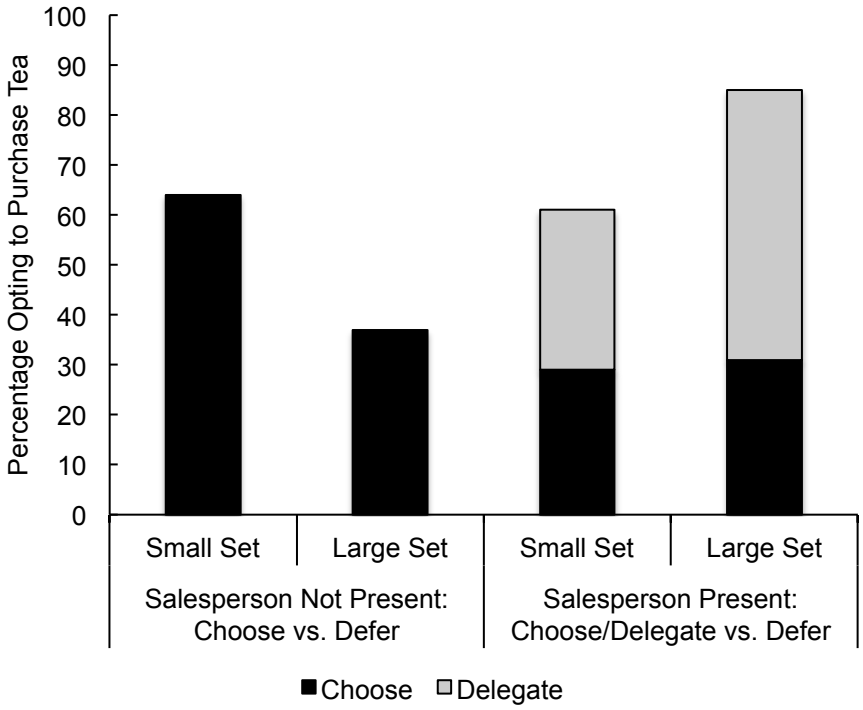

FIGURE 5

ESTIMATED SALES PER CUSTOMER BY SET SIZE AND PRESENCE OF THE OPTION TO DELEGATE TO A SALESPERSON (ASSUMING SALESPERSON CHOSE RANDOM, MOST POPULAR, OR MOST EXPENSIVE OPTION), STUDY 5