


Better to Decide Together: Shared Consumer Decision Making, Perceived Power, and Relationship Satisfaction

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Shared consumer decisions, particularly those made with a relationship partner, can be very different from decisions that are made alone. Across multiple studies, we investigate how shared consumer decision making affects perceptions of power and relationship satisfaction. We integrate two streams of research to create a novel theory about consumer decision making and perceived power. Specifically, we suggest that shared consumer decision making combines two necessary components of power—an individual's influence over and a partner's engagement in the decision—and that these combined components drive power perceptions. In other words, individuals who relinquish some control and make a decision with their partner, ironically, perceive having greater power than if they had made the decision alone. We further find that shared decision making and greater perceived power lead to greater satisfaction with the relationship in which the decisions are made. By focusing on consumer decision making within relationships, the current research contributes to the literatures on decision making, social influences in consumer behavior, close relationships, consumer well-being, and power.

Keywords consumer decision making; close relationships; social influences; power; consumer well-being; multilevel modeling

Imagine that it is a Friday night, and you are considering which restaurant to order dinner from for you and your partner. Your partner is not home yet. Should you wait for them to come home in order to decide together, or should you make the decision on your own? Or suppose that you and your roommate need laundry detergent. Should your roommate go to the store and choose one on the way home from work or should you go with your roommate and decide together? These types of consumer decisions might seem trivial, but we suggest that the way in which consumers make decisions within their relationships can influence important well-being outcomes. Specifically, we examine how consumer decisions made within couples—either by the self, by the partner, or together—affect perceived power and relationship satisfaction.

We define shared consumer decision making as a decision process that involves and affects both

members of the relationship. In interdependent relationships, the goal for the outcome of a decision is not necessarily to maximize one's own utility but rather to make mutually beneficial decisions (Kelley, 1979; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It is within this context of interdependence that we base our theory that *shared* control over decisions should lead to greater satisfaction and, perhaps more surprisingly, greater perceptions of power than making decisions by oneself. We argue that this occurs because the actual process of sharing in a decision will influence perceptions of two sources of power in close relationships: one's control over the decision (*self-influence*) and the partner's engagement in the decision (*partner engagement*). Increasing perceived power should subsequently increase relationship satisfaction. We test our theory across a series of studies, including experimental designs and studies with both members of the dyad, across different types of consumer decisions and different types of close relationships.

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The present research makes several contributions. First, by exploring how consumer decisions are made within couples, we contribute to the growing literature on social influences in decision making (Arora, Henderson, & Liu, 2011; Halevy & Chou, 2014; McFerran, Dahl, Fitzsimons, & Morales, 2009; Nikolova & Lambertson, 2016; Schuldt, Chabris, Woolley, & Hackman, 2017; Tu, Shaw, & Fishbach, 2015; Wu, Moore, & Fitzsimons, 2018). This includes research demonstrating that consumers make decisions with others differently than when they make decisions alone (Corfman & Lehmann, 1987; Nikolova, Lambertson, & Coleman, 2017; Polman, 2012; Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006; Simpson, Giskevicius, & Rothman, 2012). Second, we focus on an understudied aspect of consumer satisfaction—namely, satisfaction with the relationship in which the decision was made. We further highlight the underlying mechanism of this effect: shared decision making increases perceptions of one's influence over the decision and the partner's engagement in it. In so doing, we integrate two conceptualizations of power to present a novel theory, thus extending the literature on social power (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Guinote, 2008; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Rucker & Galinsky, 2016; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012; Rucker, Galinsky, & Magee, 2018; Rucker, Hu, & Galinsky, 2014). Finally, we contribute to the close relationships literature (Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Eastwick & Hunt, 2014; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Kelley, 1979; Kelley et al., 1983; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) by highlighting how everyday consumer choices can have consequential relational and well-being outcomes.

Theoretical Background

Consumer Decision Making in Close Relationships

Consistent with the close relationships literature, we define close relationships as those with repeated interactions in which individuals are mutually dependent upon one another and, consequently, interdependent (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 2004; Clark & Reis, 1988; Kelley, 1979; Kelley et al., 1983; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In interdependent relationships, an important goal of a decision is to find an outcome that is mutually beneficial for both partners and/or the relationship (Kelley, 1979; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In this context, we investigate how aspects of the decision process—in particular, who makes the decision—can influence relationship

satisfaction. We define a *shared decision* as one in which both members of the relationship take part in the decision process (vs. only one member in a *self-made* or *partnermade* decision). Furthermore, in a shared decision, the outcome(s) of the decision process must affect both members of the relationship or aspects of the relationship itself. Individuals in close, dyadic relationships often make hundreds or thousands of consumer decisions together, and close relationships are among the strongest and most significant long-term consumer contexts (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This context involves interdependence and social influence, as the behavior and decisions of one person affect another. In turn, social influence has been shown to significantly impact decision making (e.g., Etkin, 2016; Halevy & Chou, 2014; Hasford, Kidwell, & Lopez-Kidwell, 2017; Nikolova et al., 2017; Schuldt et al., 2017; Steele, Clarke, & Washbrook, 2013; Tu et al., 2015), thus creating cyclical effects.

We propose that shared decision making will lead to greater satisfaction with the relationship in which the decision was made, compared to decisions made by only one member of the couple. In a shared decision, unlike a decision made solely by the self or a partner, both members of the couple participate in the decision process. We propose that this shared decision process leads to greater relationship satisfaction through greater perceived relationship power. Specifically, we theorize that when both members of a couple participate in a decision, each member will perceive influence over the decision (i.e., self-influence). Importantly, each member will also perceive that their partner is involved in the decision (i.e., partner engagement). Influence over and partner engagement in a decision represent the two most common, albeit sometimes contradictory, conceptualizations of power cited within the literature (Galinsky et al., 2003; Sprecher, 1985; Waller & Hill, 1951). In the current research, we theorize that high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement are necessary to increase perceptions of relationship power, which subsequently influences relationship satisfaction. We discuss each of the conceptualizations of power in turn before explaining why both are necessary.

Perceived Power and Self versus Partner Decision Making

Power has been shown to be a critical element in social relations (French & Raven, 1959). It can increase satisfaction within individual relationships (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983) and with the broader

social context (e.g., job satisfaction in organizational theory; Hollander & Offermann, 1990; Laschinger, Purdy, & Almost, 2007; Spreitzer, 1995). It is a complex, multidetermined construct that manifests in a variety of ways (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Brezsnayak & Whisman, 2004; Emerson, 1962; French & Raven, 1959; Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner et al., 2003), including in terms of how it is perceived. Perceived social power refers to the belief that one has the capacity to influence others or the belief that one has control over valuable resources (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). Importantly, in the present research, we are exploring perceived power within the context of close, interdependent relationships. In this context, partners are relatively equal to one another in their standing. Moreover, although previous research has shown that perceived power has similar correlates to structural power (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), perceived power is distinct and can be separated from structural power and status (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Blader & Chen, 2012). As such, perceived power does not necessarily translate to one's objective power within a situation. Rather, it pertains to the belief about one's ability to control valued outcomes within the social context. This view of power is in line with relationship theorists who have defined power as "potential influence" (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1993) and "the possibility of inducing forces" (Lewin, 1947). It is this perception of power that we propose increases as a result of shared decision making, and subsequently leads to greater relationship satisfaction. We also note that, unlike structural or objective power, which relies on "asymmetric control" (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), *perceived* power allows for both partners to be high on this variable, suggesting that there are potential benefits to both partners in the relationship.

On the surface, it might seem that making all of the consumer decisions in the relationship (i.e., the self as the decision maker) should lead to the greatest perceptions of one's power in the relationship. After all, if one is making the decisions, then one has control over the outcomes. In turn, greater control allows one to pursue one's own goals, desires, and interests, all of which are associated with greater perceptions of power (Ng, 1980). Social projection theory—the projection of one's own traits, attitudes and values onto other groups (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Robbins & Krueger, 2005)—also suggests that decision-making individuals should perceive greater power. Through the act of repeatedly making decisions, one has more opportunities to project one's own

preferences, attitudes, and traits onto others. Previous research has found that greater social projection is associated with greater power. For example, individuals who engaged in greater social projection (i.e., believed their own traits were more representative of the group) reported greater power (Overbeck & Droutman, 2013).

However, there is ample theoretical evidence to suggest that the opposite is actually true: that *not* making decisions leads to greater perceived power in a relationship. Indeed, sociologists and psychologists have long linked differential interest to power dynamics (e.g., Cook, Cheshire, & Gerbasi, 2006; Sprecher, Schmeckle, & Felmlee, 2006; Stanley et al., 2017). Waller's Principle of Least Interest (Overall & Cross, 2019; Waller, 1937; Waller & Hill, 1951) posits that the individual who is least interested in the relationship holds the most power in the relationship. This theory stems from the idea that the least interested person has invested less in the relationship. Along similar lines, Interdependence Theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) posits that the individual who is less invested in the relationship is also less dependent upon the relationship, and lower dependency is associated with greater power and control in the relationship (Attridge, Berscheid, & Simpson, 1995; Fiske, 1993; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Research has shown that the intentions of individuals who have less interest in the relationship are more highly predictive of the couple's joint intention (VanderDrift, Agnew, Harvey, & Warren, 2013). Taken together, these ideas suggest that the person who is least interested or invested should perceive greater power in the relationship.

Empirical support for this notion can be found in several different studies (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997; for overviews, see also Overall & Cross, 2019; Simpson, Farrell, Oriña, & Rothman, 2015). For example, in an interview study of 231 dating couples, Peplau (1979) found that the partner who was less involved in the relationship was also more likely to be the more powerful partner (cf. Sprecher, 1985). Similarly, Sprecher (1985) looked at a variety of resources that one can contribute to a relationship, including affective, physical, and companionship resources. She found that contributing more and being more involved in the relationship was associated with less power. Applying these findings to decision making suggests that the person not making the decisions is likely to be less involved in the relationship and possibly less interested in the relationship. Consequently, this person may be likely to perceive greater power in the relationship.

Research on teams and dyads also suggests that the person not making the decisions might have more power. Researchers have found that a necessary component of empowerment is the degree to which a task has meaning, or the extent to which a team cares about a task (Spreitzer, 1995, 2008). If one partner is making all of the decisions in a relationship, this could suggest that the decisions have little meaning or value to the other partner or the relationship. For example, when grocery shopping for a household, one makes many decisions about what will enter the household and will eventually be consumed by loved ones. Intuitively, it seems that such decisions should have a great deal of meaning or value. However, many people view these types of consumption decisions as inconsequential, and one partner is often “stuck” with the role. In such cases, the person who is making all the decisions is expending a great deal of effort and resources on a task that is perceived to have little meaning or value, which likely makes that person feel less powerful. Conversely, the person *not* making the consumption decisions gets to reap the rewards of these decisions without the associated effort, which most likely makes that person feel more powerful.

Taken together, the two previous streams of literature examining control over decisions and interest in the relationship suggests competing predictions regarding when consumer decision making will lead to greater perceived power. On the one hand, the person making all of the decisions (i.e., self-decision maker) could be expected to feel the most power in the relationship, as making decisions likely leads to greater control over the outcome. On the other hand, the person not making the decisions (i.e., partner decision maker) could be expected to feel the most power, as making fewer decisions in the relationship may be associated with being less interested or invested in the relationship. In the present research, we suggest the answer to who will perceive the most power lies in the middle—namely, that making decisions together, that is, shared decisions, should lead to the greatest perceptions of relationship power and subsequent satisfaction.

Shared Consumer Decision Making and Perceived Power

We theorize that shared consumer decision making will lead to greater perceptions of relationship power because shared decision making combines an individual's influence with a partner's

engagement in the decision. We suggest that both self-influence and partner engagement are necessary for increasing perceived power.

Social power is often defined as controlling valued resources (Anderson et al., 2012; Fiske, 1993; French & Raven, 1959; Galinsky et al., 2003). If Partner A is making the decisions in the relationship, then Partner A has influence over resources and outcomes. This seems to suggest that Partner A should perceive greater power than Partner B. However, what if Partner A is making the decisions because Partner B is not interested or does not care about the decision, as in the grocery shopping example above? In this case, even though Partner A has influence over all the decisions without Partner B's engagement, the decisions will be perceived to have little meaning or value. In accordance with previous research (e.g., Spreitzer, 1995; Waller & Hill, 1951), control over a decision that lacks meaning should lead to lower perceptions of power.

We posit that a key component of perceived power in close relationships is that the decision has meaning and that this meaning stems from partner engagement in the decision. That is, by a partner merely engaging (i.e., participating) in a consumer decision, decisions, including those as seemingly trivial as which laundry detergent to buy, have meaning. This reasoning is in line with the research showing that meaning stems from a teammate's interest and involvement in a decision (Spreitzer, 2008). Having influence over a decision that has meaning, via partner engagement, should lead to greater perceptions of power. Therefore, we hypothesize that while either self-influence, that is, control over the decision, *or* partner engagement, that is, partner participation, will be high in a decision made by one partner, in a shared decision *both* self-influence *and* partner engagement will be high. High levels of both self-influence and partner engagement should lead to increased perceptions of power.

It is important to note that our theory here is distinct from that of previous research in a couple of ways. First, previous research has focused on influence as an outcome of structural power (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Here, we suggest that the opportunity to, or the belief that one can, influence valued outcomes (regardless of the objective resource level) leads to greater perceived power. Second, previous research has framed the meaning of the decision in relation to the value of the specific resource (e.g., Magee & Galinsky, 2008). It is often determined by the cost, size, objective “weight,” or importance of the decision. Instead,

we suggest that the meaning of the decision comes from partner engagement. It signals “this must be something we care about,” regardless of what is being decided, and why we theorize this effect will occur across different types of decisions.

Effects on Relationship Satisfaction

We also hypothesize that shared consumer decision making and perceived relationship power will be associated with greater relationship satisfaction. Close relationships involve repeated interactions in which individuals become mutually dependent upon one another; as such, decisions that continually benefit one partner may not benefit the relationship itself, especially when they are made at the expense of the other partner. According to equity theory, an individual’s drive to maximize personal outcomes is tempered by the rationality of interdependence (Hatfield, Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Consequently, an individual’s goal for the outcome of a decision that affects the couple is not necessarily to maximize one’s own utility, but rather to make mutually beneficial decisions or ones that benefit the relationship. Shared decision making allows individuals to accomplish these goals through “mutual fate control” (Kelley et al., 1983; Thibaut & Kelley, 1979), constructed preferences (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1992), and increased goal instrumentality, which has been associated with more positive evaluations of close others and greater closeness with others (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize that shared decision making will be associated with greater relationship satisfaction.

Shared consumer decision making, as we have defined it, requires both partners to participate in the decision process. Joint participation gives each partner an opportunity to influence the outcome of a decision that, due to the other partner’s engagement, has meaning and value. This opportunity to influence a meaningful decision should translate to increased perceived power in the relationship. As perceived power increases, so should relationship satisfaction. Prior research has consistently found that greater relationship power is associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Dunbar, 2004; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Smith & Hofmann, 2016; Sprecher et al., 2006). Research in organizational behavior has also found that the more influence individuals perceive in a situation, the happier they are with the situation and the environment (Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010; van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Accordingly, we

predict that perceived relationship power will mediate the link between shared consumer decision making and relationship satisfaction.

Current Research

In the current research, we investigated the effects of shared consumer decision making on perceived power and relationship satisfaction. We first examined whether shared consumer decision making (vs. decision making by only one member of the couple) led to greater relationship satisfaction (studies 1A and 1B). In study 2, using both members of a romantic couple, we tested whether shared consumer decision making is associated with greater relationship satisfaction through increased perceptions of relationship power. Study 3 also used dyadic data and extended the previous findings by including additional types of close relationships. In study 4, we manipulated shared decision making and examined alternative explanations. Finally, in study 5, we tested our full theoretical model using data from each member of the couple and manipulating decision making. Specifically, we tested whether shared decision making led to the highest levels of both self-influence and partner engagement—our two proposed necessary components of perceived power—and whether high levels of both of those components increased perceptions of power, which in turn, led to increased relationship satisfaction.

Study 1A

In our first study, we manipulated shared consumer decision making and examined the effects on relationship satisfaction. Specifically, we used an immersive scenario design in which participants imagined making a shared decision with their partner compared with making a decision by themselves or having a decision made by their partner. We predicted that relationship satisfaction will be greatest in the shared decision condition.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from Prolific. Inclusion criteria were living in the United States, having been in a romantic relationship with their partner for at least 6 months, having lived with their

partner for at least 3 months, English language ability, and having not taken the survey multiple times. Two hundred eighty-seven participants (112 men, 2 other/nonbinary) completed this study in exchange for financial compensation. Participants had an average age of 36.34 years ($SD = 10.80$) and had been in a relationship for 132.11 months on average ($SD = 111.16$, median = 97 months).

Measures and Procedure

After providing consent, all participants were told that we were interested in decision making in relationships and that we would ask them to imagine a scenario as if it were real. Participants then provided the first name of their partner, which was inserted into the survey. They were told the following: "You and [partner name] have been planning on purchasing a car for the two of you to use, and you decide to visit a dealership together." We showed them images of a car dealership and asked them questions to make the experience more immersive. Participants were randomized to one of three conditions: (a) shared decision, (b) self decision, or (c) partner decision. In the shared decision condition, participants imagined that they and their partner made the decision together. In the self and partner conditions, respectively, participants imagined that they or their partner made the decision alone (see the Methodological Details Appendix [MDA]).

All participants were asked to keep the scenario in mind as they completed a standard measure of relationship satisfaction (Relationship Satisfaction subscale from the Investment Model Scale; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; $\alpha = 0.97$; see MDA). Demographic variables were also collected.

Results and Discussion

We examined the effect of decision-making condition on relationship satisfaction. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between groups ($F(2, 284) = 64.25, p < .001$). In line with predictions, planned comparisons revealed that participants in the shared decision making condition ($M = 6.01, SD = 0.78$) reported significantly greater relationship satisfaction compared to participants in the self ($M = 4.14, SD = 1.79; t(284) = 8.59, p < .001$) and partner ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.89; t(284) = 10.62, p < .001$) decision making conditions. The self and partner conditions were also significantly different from one another ($t(284) = -2.54, p = .01$).

In this initial study, we find that shared decisions are associated with greater relationship satisfaction than decisions made by the self or partner alone.

Study 1B

In study 1B, we again manipulated shared consumer decision making, but we examined a different consumer decision context. Additionally, we varied the outcome of the decision. That is, we examined whether there are differences in the effects of shared decision making on relationship satisfaction depending upon whether the outcome of the decision is satisfactory or not. Because we theorize that it is the process of sharing in the decision, and not the outcome of the decision, that leads to greater relationship satisfaction, we hypothesize that shared decision making will lead to greater relationship satisfaction regardless of the decision outcome.

Method

Participants

Five hundred forty-one individuals (231 men, 9 other/nonbinary) from Prolific completed this study. We used the same study criteria as in study 1A. Individuals received financial compensation in exchange for their participation. Participants had an average age of 37.02 years ($SD = 11.91$) and had been in a relationship for 140.30 months on average ($SD = 117.34$, median = 101 months).

Measures and Procedure

Participants were told that they and their partner (whose first name was inserted into the survey) wanted to purchase a new couch. As in study 1A, participants were randomized to one of three conditions: (a) shared decision, (b) self decision, (c) or partner decision. In order to make the scenario more realistic, participants were asked to indicate what factors they and their partner (or they or their partner, depending upon the condition) would consider when choosing a couch to purchase (see MDA). All participants were told that the couch arrived a week later. As our outcome manipulation, half of the participants were told that they were quite satisfied with the new couch (positive outcome condition) and the other half were told that

they were quite dissatisfied with the new couch (negative outcome condition).

Participants were told to keep the scenario in mind as they completed the same measure of relationship satisfaction used previously (Rusbult et al., 1998; $\alpha = 0.94$). Finally, they provided demographic information.

Results and Discussion

We predicted that shared decision making would be associated with greater relationship satisfaction regardless of the outcome of the decision. In line with this prediction, a two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of decision making condition ($F(2, 535) = 17.66, p < .001$). Planned comparisons revealed that participants in the shared decision making condition ($M = 5.86, SD = 0.98$) reported significantly greater relationship satisfaction compared to those in the self ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.41; t(535) = 4.03, p < .001$) and partner ($M = 5.05, SD = 1.52; t(535) = 5.79, p < .001$) decision making conditions. Satisfaction was marginally greater in the self condition than in the partner condition ($t(535) = 1.76, p = .08$). There was not a significant effect of outcome condition ($F(1, 535) = 0.64, p = .43$). Importantly, there was also not a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 535) = 1.64, p = .20$). As predicted, planned comparisons revealed that the shared decision making conditions did not differ from one another ($M_{\text{shAREDsatisfied}} = 5.82, SD = 0.92$ vs. $M_{\text{shAREDdissatisfied}} = 5.89, SD = 1.03; t(535) = 0.36, p = .72$). These findings again highlight that shared decision making is associated with greater relationship satisfaction compared to when a decision is made by only one partner. Moreover, the findings further highlight that this effect occurs regardless of the outcome of the decision, suggesting that it is the process, not the outcome, of the shared decision that leads to greater relationship satisfaction.

Study 2

In study 2, we tested our hypothesis that shared consumer decision making is associated with greater relationship satisfaction compared to individual decision making and that this effect is mediated by perceptions of power. We included both members of the couple and predicted that partners who viewed the decisions in the relationship as being largely shared would report greater perceived power and relationship satisfaction than partners who viewed the decisions as being made more by

one partner or the other. In addition, since these are dyadic data, we also investigated whether the effect of shared consumer decision making on relationship power would be affected by an actor-partner interaction effect (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Because we theorize that shared decision making involves the belief that one can influence meaningful outcomes, meaning that stems from partner participation, we speculated that the effect of shared consumer decision making on relationship power would be strongest for participants whose partners also viewed the relationship as high in shared consumer decision making.

Method

Participants

Sixty couples (59 heterosexual and 1 lesbian) who had been in a relationship together for at least 6 months and living together for at least 3 months were recruited from a farmer's market in the southeastern United States as part of a larger study on relationships. Couples received a gift card in exchange for their participation. Partners ranged in age from 22-65 years, with an average age of 34.34 years ($SD = 9.80$) and had been in a relationship for 110.74 months on average ($SD = 108.60$, median = 71.5 months).

Measures and Procedure

After each member of the couple consented, they were asked to fill out the questionnaires separately and not to discuss any of their answers with each other. Participants completed a measure of perceived relationship power (Brick, Fitzsimons, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2018), which is a modified version of a power scale that has been used extensively in the power literature (Anderson et al., 2012; $\alpha = 0.78$). Items on this measure ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include: "I can get my partner to listen to what I say," "My wishes do not carry much weight," and "I think I have a great deal of power" (see MDA for full scale). Participants also completed the same relationship satisfaction measure (Rusbult et al., 1998; $\alpha = 0.90$) used in studies 1A and 1B.

Participants then completed the Shared Decision Making in Relationships Measure, a series of 10 items we designed to measure the extent to which a couple makes decisions together (see MDA for full scale). The items capture a variety of consumer

decisions made in relationships. Participants were given three response options—"I mainly decide," "my partner mainly decides," and "we decide together"—to complete a variety of statements, such as: "When it comes to daily decisions about what to do with money in your household (e.g., buying food or other small household items like toothpaste, cleaning supplies, and other necessities)"; "When making smaller lifestyle decisions (e.g., how often you go out, where you go, what TV shows to watch)"; "When it comes to medium household investment decisions (e.g., purchasing new bedroom or living room furniture, or remodeling)"; and "When it comes to large financial investment decisions (e.g., how much to spend on rent, how much to invest in a mortgage, how much to put in savings, and how much to put in retirement accounts)." Finally, participants completed additional variables and provided demographic information.

Results

Primary Analyses

Two participants were excluded from the analyses because of unclear written responses and partner influence while completing the survey, leaving 118 participants. Because these are dyadic data, we used multilevel modeling (Kenny et al., 2006), with individuals nested within couples across all analyses.

First, we examined whether partners who viewed most of the consumer decisions in their relationship as shared reported greater levels of relationship power and greater relationship satisfaction. We summed the number of shared (i.e., "we decide together") responses on the 10-item Shared Decision Making in Relationships Measure to create a Shared Decision Score for each individual. Dyadic analyses revealed that partners who reported greater shared decision making in the relationship reported greater relationship power ($B = 0.08$, $t(115.89) = 2.42$; $p = .017$) and greater relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.11$, $t(77.88) = 2.88$; $p = .005$). When relationship power (mean-centered) is added to the model of shared decision making (mean-centered) predicting relationship satisfaction, relationship power remains a strong and significant predictor ($B = 0.56$, $t(110.06) = 5.49$; $p < .001$) of relationship satisfaction. Because these are dyadic data, we conducted an analysis using the Sobel test calculator (quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm) to test for mediation. The Sobel test indicated that the

indirect effect of shared decision making on relationship satisfaction through perceived power was significantly different from zero ($z = 2.25$, $p = .02$). We conducted an additional analysis using the Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The 95% confidence interval for the distribution of the indirect effect did not contain zero [0.009, 0.089], further suggesting that perceived power indeed mediates the effect of shared decision making on relationship satisfaction and thus supporting our previous findings.

Actor–Partner Interdependence Model Analyses

In order to explore the possibility that the effect of shared consumer decision making on relationship power would be strongest for individuals who (a) saw themselves as high in shared consumer decision making and (b) had partners who saw themselves as high in shared consumer decision making, we conducted additional analyses using the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). APIM analyses estimate actor and partner effects separately within a multilevel modeling framework. Predictor variables were grand-mean-centered (Kenny et al., 2006). APIM analyses regressing relationship power on actor's shared decision making, partner's shared decision making, and their interaction term revealed a significant main effect for actor's shared decision making ($B = 0.08$, $t(109.53) = 2.27$, $p = .025$) and a significant interaction effect ($B = 0.04$, $t(59.24) = 2.12$, $p = .039$). For actors with partners who reported low levels of shared consumer decision making (-1 SD), there was not a significant effect of shared consumer decision making on actor's relationship power ($B = -0.005$, $t(82.13) = -0.86$, $p > .25$). However, for actors with partners who reported high levels of shared decision making ($+1$ SD), there was a significant effect of shared consumer decision making on actor's relationship power ($B = 0.16$, $t(80.88) = 3.24$, $p = .002$) (see Figure 1).

Discussion

We expanded upon our earlier findings by incorporating shared consumer decision making from both members of the couple. We tested and found support for our hypothesis that individuals who make a shared consumer decision report greater satisfaction with the relationship compared to situations in which only one partner makes a decision for the couple. Further, we found that partners who report greater shared decision making report

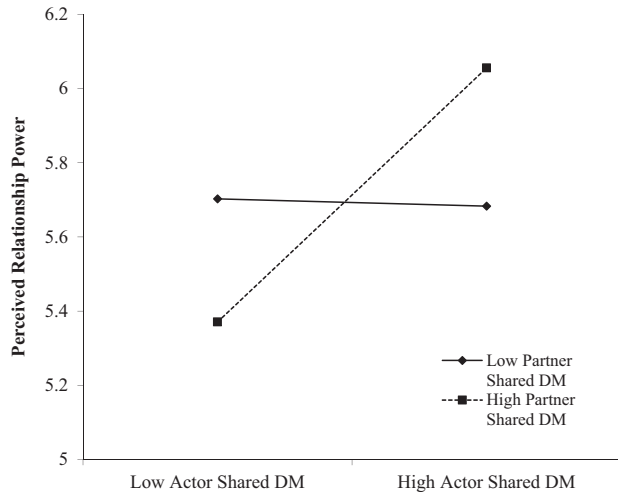


Figure 1. Results from study 3: Perceived relationship power is greatest when both partners within the couple view decision making as shared.

greater perceived power in the relationship, and greater perceived power in the relationship is associated with greater relationship satisfaction for both members of the couple. Lastly, we found that an individual's perception of relationship power is greatest when both members of the couple perceive high levels of shared decision making, highlighting the importance of the partner's perspective.

Study 3

In study 3, we examined the effects of shared consumer decision making on perceived power and relationship satisfaction across different types of close relationships.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited as part of a multi-study event examining social interactions via a community sample using an online announcement. Participants were required to participate with a partner. Sixty-three dyads (126 individuals; 48 men) who ranged in age from 18 to 59 years, with a mean age of 24.90 ($SD = 7.18$) years, completed this study in exchange for financial compensation.

Measures and Procedure

Both members of the dyad attended the study session together and completed the same set of

studies. All participants first completed a set of demographic items, which included the same measures of perceived relationship power (Brick et al., 2018; $\alpha = 0.77$) and relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998; $\alpha = 0.87$). Within the demographic data, participants were asked to classify their relationship with their partner into one of the following categories: romantic partner; friend; co-worker; roommate or housemate; sibling; other family member; or other (please describe). The dyads consisted of romantic partners (33.3%), friends (54.8%), co-workers (4.8%), roommates or housemates (4.0%), and other family members (3.2%).

As part of an unrelated study on dyadic decision making within the study bundle, participants completed a single-item measure assessing the extent to which they viewed the decisions in their relationship with their participation partner as shared ("please indicate how often decisions in your relationship are shared"). This item was measured on a 1 (none of the time) to 7 (all of the time) Likert scale. Note that in this study, participants completed the shared decision making item separately from the measures of relationship power and satisfaction.

Results and Discussion

Because these are dyadic data, we again used multilevel modeling with individuals nested within couples (Kenny et al., 2006). Dyadic analyses revealed that participants who reported greater shared decision making in the relationship reported significantly greater perceived relationship power ($B = 0.20$, $t(119.32) = 3.35$; $p < .001$) and significantly greater relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.36$, $t(110.85) = 5.42$; $p < .001$).

When perceived relationship power (mean-centered) is added to the model of shared decision making (mean-centered) predicting relationship satisfaction, perceived power remains a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.25$, $t(99.29) = 2.59$; $p = .01$). We conducted an analysis using the Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation to further test for mediation (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The 95% confidence interval for the distribution of the indirect effect did not contain zero [0.019, 0.143].

We repeated the analyses controlling for whether or not the partner was a romantic partner. The results remained consistent, such that greater shared decision making was still associated with significantly greater perceived power ($B = 0.17$, $t(117.49) = 2.93$; $p = .004$) and relationship

satisfaction ($B = 0.33$, $t(114.09) = 4.94$; $p < .001$). We also examined the effects of shared decision making on perceived power and relationship satisfaction using romantic partner as an additional factor. There was not a significant interaction effect of shared decision making and romantic partner on perceived power ($B = -0.20$, $t(110.06) = -1.55$; $p = .13$), nor on relationship satisfaction ($B = -0.04$, $t(118.72) = -0.25$; $p = .81$), suggesting that shared decision making leads to greater relationship satisfaction through perceived power, regardless of relationship type.

Study 4

In study 4, we manipulated consumer decision making and tested whether perceived relationship power mediates the effect on relationship satisfaction. Because relationships are complex and multi-dimensional phenomena, we included measures of trust, appreciation, personal control, and respect to ascertain whether our perceived power findings hold when controlling for these other factors.

Method

Participants

Five hundred seventy-one participants (233 men) from Prolific completed this study. Inclusion criteria were living in the United States, English language ability, having been in a romantic relationship with their partner for at least 6 months, and having lived with their partner for at least 3 months. Individuals received financial compensation in exchange for their participation. After excluding those who did not meet the study criteria and those who entered nonsensical answers in the free response section, we were left with a sample of 513 participants. The participants ranged in age from 18-75 years, with an average age of 36.71 years ($SD = 11.44$) and had been in a relationship for 134.95 months on average ($SD = 111.71$, median = 99 months).

Measures and Procedure

After providing consent, participants provided the first name of their romantic partner. They were told that we were interested in consumer decision making and that we would show them a scenario. In this scenario, they were asked to imagine that they and their partner wanted to purchase a new couch for their living room. Participants were then

randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) the participant browsed the options and made the final decision on which couch to purchase (self decision making condition); (b) the partner browsed the options and made the final decision (partner decision making condition); or (c) both the participant and their partner browsed the options and made the final decision together (shared decision making condition) (see MDA).

After viewing the scenario, participants then completed the same relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998; $\alpha = 0.95$) and perceived relationship power (Brick et al., 2018; $\alpha = 0.88$) measures used in the previous studies. Next, participants completed measures for possible alternative explanations: trust in partner (dependability subscale; Rempel et al., 1985), appreciation for partner, personal control (Greenaway, Louis, & Hornsey, 2013), and respect toward partner (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006; for full scales of all of the measures, please see the MDA). We also collected demographic variables.

Results

First, we examined the effect of decision making condition on relationship satisfaction. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between groups ($F(2, 510) = 23.13$, $p < .001$). Planned contrasts showed that participants in the shared decision making condition ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 0.98$) reported significantly greater relationship satisfaction compared to those in the self ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.59$; $t(510) = 5.56$, $p < .001$) and partner ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.88$; $t(510) = 6.17$, $p < .001$) decision making conditions. The self and partner conditions were not significantly different from each other ($t(510) = 0.65$, $p = .52$). We then examined the effect of decision making condition on perceived relationship power. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the groups ($F(2, 510) = 8.17$, $p < .001$). Specifically, planned contrasts showed that participants in the shared decision making condition ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 0.96$) reported significantly greater power compared to those in the partner condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.35$; $t(510) = 4.03$, $p < .001$) and marginally significantly greater power compared to those in the self condition ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.16$; $t(510) = 1.77$, $p = .08$). Those in the self condition also reported greater power compared to those in the partner condition ($t(510) = 2.28$, $p = .02$).

To test our mediation model, we conducted an analysis with power as the mediator of the effect of

decision-making condition on relationship satisfaction, using the shared condition as the reference condition (PROCESS Model 4, 5000 bootstrap samples, Hayes, 2012). We first examined the results for the comparison between the shared and self-decision-making conditions. As predicted, perceived power mediated the effect of decision making on relationship satisfaction ($a B = 0.13$, 95% CI $[-0.281, -0.002]$). Next, we examined the results for the comparison of the shared and partner decision making conditions, finding that perceived power again mediated the effect on relationship satisfaction ($a B = 0.31$, 95% CI $[-0.480, -0.150]$) (see Figure 2).

We explored whether the mediating effects of power hold when controlling for other relational variables. Indeed, when including trust, respect, appreciation and control in a model with decision making, perceived power, and relationship satisfaction, perceived power remains a significant mediator (comparing the shared and self-conditions, $ab_{\text{power}} = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.188, -0.001]$; comparing the shared and partner conditions, $ab_{\text{power}} = 0.20$, 95% CI $[-0.329, -0.089]$; see the MDA for more details about the model). Further, although the decision making condition significantly influenced respect ($F(2, 510) = 7.65$, $p = .001$), the decision making condition did not significantly affect any of the other variables (trust in the partner: $F(2, 510) = 0.18$, $p = .83$; appreciation: $F(2, 510) = 2.08$, $p = .13$, personal control: $F(2, 510) = 0.15$, $p = .86$).

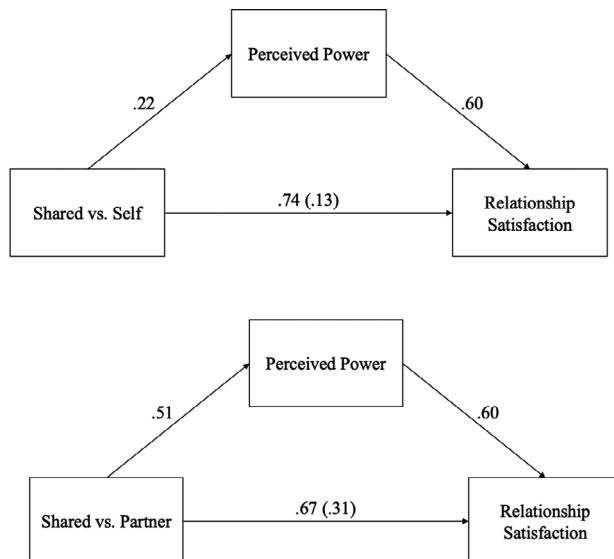


Figure 2. Results from study 4: Perceived power mediates the link between shared consumer decision making and relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

In this study, we manipulated shared decision making and replicated the previous findings that shared decision making leads to greater relationship satisfaction through perceived power. Relationships are complex, and we know that many effects are determined by multiple factors (Kirmani, 2015). As such, we included additional relational variables to see if our findings hold when controlling for these variables. We find that they do, suggesting that perceived power is an important construct to consider when evaluating the effects of shared decision making on relationship satisfaction.

Although we theorize and provide evidence that shared decision making leads to increased perceptions of power (see MDA for an additional study manipulating shared decision making and measuring perceived relationship power), one might wonder if it is the other way around—that is, if increased perceptions of power lead to shared decision making. To address this alternative question, we conducted an additional study on Prolific ($N = 169$, excluding those who did not meet the relationship requirements and those who indicated they might have taken a similar study before). We manipulated power using a standard power manipulation, which we modified slightly to reflect the relationship context (Galinsky et al., 2003). Specifically, participants were asked to recall a time when either they had power over their partner (high power) or their partner had power over them (low power). We next measured preference for shared decision making. Participants then read a scenario in which they needed a new washing machine. They were asked whether they would prefer to make the decision with their partner or by themselves. Results revealed that there was no effect of power on shared decision making preference ($\beta = 0.46$, $SE = 0.46$, $Wald-\chi^2(1, N = 169) = 1.00$, $p = .32$). In other words, manipulating perceptions of power did not influence preference for shared decision making. These findings, taken together with those of the previous studies, suggest a directional link between shared consumer decision making and greater perceived relationship power.

Study 5

In study 5, we examined what drives the increase in perceptions of power from shared decision making. Previous research has theorized that control over outcomes (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Fiske,

1993) and the meaning of a decision are important sources of power (Spreitzer, 2008). In the present research, we combine these streams of research to suggest that high levels of *both* of these constructs are necessary to increase perceived power. We posit that this is the case in shared decision making, as it combines both self-influence (i.e., control over the outcome of the decision) and partner engagement (i.e., participation of the partner in the decision). We again used data from both members of the couple to test this process theory. Specifically, we manipulated shared decision making in couples, measured self-influence and partner engagement, and measured perceived relationship power. We predicted that couples in the shared decision making condition would report high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement and that high levels of both these variables would lead to increased perceptions of relationship power, which would subsequently be associated with greater relationship satisfaction (see Figure 3).

Method

Participants

We recruited 61 couples (58 heterosexual, 1 lesbian and 2 transgender) from a farmer's market in the Southeastern United States. Inclusion criteria were having been in the relationship for at least 6 months and having lived together for at least 3 months. Couples received financial compensation in exchange for their participation. The couples ranged in age from 22 to 72 years with an average age of 37.18 years ($SD = 12.71$) and had been in their relationship for 134.50 months on average ($SD = 142.23$, median = 78.50 months).

Measures and Procedure

After each partner indicated consent, couples were told that there were several parts to the study

and that the researchers were interested in different topics. The couples were asked to complete the questionnaires separately. For clarity, we report all measures associated with the hypotheses in the main text. Additional measures and analyses, including replication analyses, are reported in the MDA.

Shared recall manipulation. We manipulated shared decision making using a recall paradigm. Couples were randomized to one of three recall conditions, in which they were asked to recall: (a) a time when they decided on and purchased an item for themselves and their partner to use (self decision making condition); (b) a time when their partner decided on and purchased an item for themselves and their partner to use (partner decision making condition); or (c) a time when they *and* their partner decided on and purchased an item for themselves and their partner to use (shared decision making condition). Although couples completed the study separately, they were randomized to the same condition.

Sources of power measure. We asked the partners a series of questions about the specific decision. These questions were designed to measure the extent to which they felt they had influenced the decision and the extent to which they felt their partner was engaged in the decision. We assessed these constructs by asking participants to indicate their agreement with six items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) in relation to the specific decision described. Self-influence was measured using the following items: "I had a great deal of influence in the decision"; "I helped make the decision"; and "I contributed to the decision" ($\alpha = 0.94$). Partner engagement was measured by the following: "My partner had a lot of interest in the decision"; "My partner was involved in the decision"; and "My partner cared about the decision" ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Finally, participants completed the Perceived Relationship Power measure (Brick et al., 2018;

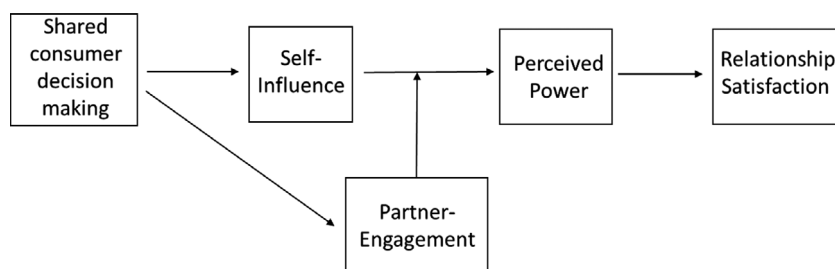


Figure 3. Shared consumer decision making leads to greater perceived power and relationship satisfaction because it combines high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement.

$\alpha = 0.87$), some additional variables including demographic items, and the same relationship satisfaction measure (Rusbult et al., 1998) used in the previous studies.

Results

Two undergraduate research assistants blind to the hypotheses of the study coded the responses to ensure participants had accurately recalled a recent purchase and their assigned condition as a manipulation check. Any disputes between the coders were resolved through discussion. Twenty-four partners incorrectly completed the manipulation (e.g., leaving the manipulation question blank, describing an item that was not for both partners' use, providing unclear answers, etc.) and were excluded from the subsequent analyses, leaving 98 participants.

We propose that shared consumer decision making leads to greater relationship power because it combines high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement. These are dyadic data; therefore, we used a multilevel modeling approach (Kenny et al., 2006), in which we conducted a series of regressions with individuals nested within couples to account for violations of statistical independence. Results revealed that a shared decision was associated with significantly greater self-influence than a partner decision ($B = -2.64$, $t(45.07) = -9.22$; $p < .001$). Although a shared decision did not significantly differ from a self decision in terms of self-influence, self-influence was just as high in a shared decision as in a self-decision ($B = 0.28$, $t(44.76) = 1.00$; $p > .25$). A shared decision was also associated with significantly greater partner engagement than a self decision ($B = -1.93$, $t(51.65) = -5.91$; $p < .001$). Although a shared decision did not significantly differ from a partner decision in terms of partner engagement, partner engagement was just as high in a shared decision as in a partner decision ($B = -0.03$, $t(51.88) = -0.09$; $p > .25$). In other words, whereas self decision making and partner decision making were high on *either* self-influence or partner engagement, shared consumer decision making, as predicted, was associated with high levels of *both* variables.

We next examined whether high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement lead to the greatest perceptions of relationship power. Again, using multilevel modeling, we conducted a regression with self-influence (mean-centered), partner engagement (mean-centered), and their interaction as predictor variables and perception of relationship

power as the outcome variable. Results revealed a marginally significant simple effect of self-influence ($B = 0.11$, $t(85.01) = 1.78$; $p = .08$). There was not a significant simple effect of partner engagement on relationship power ($B = 0.01$, $t(83.64) = 0.19$; $p > .25$). Importantly, there was a marginally significant interaction effect ($B = 0.09$, $t(92.67) = 1.79$; $p = .076$) (see Figure 4).

Examining the interaction, we found that when partner engagement was low (-1 SD), there was no effect of self-influence on perceived power ($B = -0.02$, $t(90.38) = -0.22$; $p = .83$). On the other hand, when partner engagement was high ($+1$ SD), greater self-influence was associated with greater perceived power ($B = 0.24$, $t(90.08) = 3.15$; $p = .002$), suggesting that high levels of both partner engagement and self-influence are necessary to increase perceptions of relationship power.

We also examined the serial relationship between shared consumer decision making and satisfaction with the relationship. As presented above, in the first set of analyses, we found that shared consumer decision making is associated with the greatest levels of self-influence and partner engagement. Moreover, the interaction of self-influence and partner engagement is associated with increased perceptions of relationship power, indicating that shared decision making influences perceived power through self-influence and partner engagement. Because these are dyadic data, which violate the assumption of independence in observations, we tested for serial mediation using a second set of analyses. We examined whether high levels of self-influence and partner engagement lead to greater relationship satisfaction through perceived power.

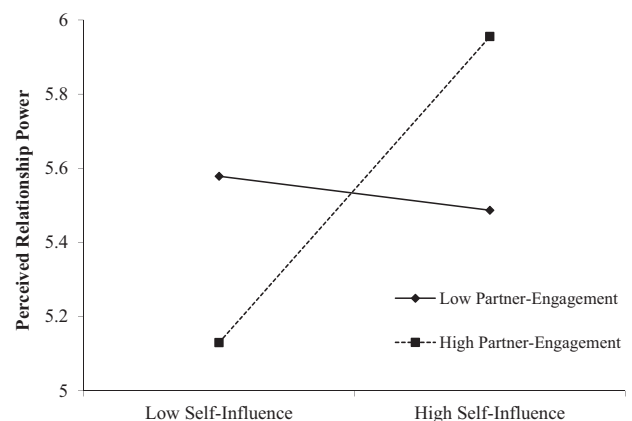


Figure 4. Results from study 5: Individuals report the greatest perceptions of relationship power when both partner engagement and self-influence are high.

Specifically, we conducted a series of regression analyses, again using multilevel modeling with individuals nested within couples. A regression analysis with self-influence (mean-centered), partner engagement (mean-centered) and their interaction effect on relationship satisfaction revealed a significant interaction effect ($B = 0.12$, $t(77.7) = 3.18$; $p = .002$). We then examined whether perceived power was related to relationship satisfaction. A regression analyses revealed that perceived power (mean-centered) significantly and positively predicted relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.39$, $t(88.9) = 5.03$; $p < .001$). To test for mediation, we repeated the analysis of self-influence (mean-centered), partner engagement (mean-centered) and their interaction effect on relationship satisfaction, but we entered perceived power (mean-centered) into the model. Results revealed that although perceived power remains a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.33$, $t(80.3) = 4.19$; $p < .001$), the effect of the interaction of partner engagement and self-influence on relationship satisfaction is weakened when perceived power is entered into the model ($B = 0.09$, $t(85.9) = 2.29$; $p = .025$), suggesting mediation.

To further test for mediation, we conducted an analysis using the Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (Selig & Preacher, 2008) in R. In this analysis we used the coefficients from the multilevel model parameters for the interaction term of self-influence and partner engagement predicting relationship power ($B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.04$) and the mediator term of relationship power (when the interaction term is also a predictor) on relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.08$), the variances of the interaction and relationship power parameters, and their covariance. The 95% confidence interval for the distribution of the indirect effect did not contain zero [0.004, 0.058], further suggesting that perceived power mediates the interaction effect of high partner engagement and self-influence on relationship satisfaction. These analyses indicate that shared decision making leads to the highest levels of self-influence and partner engagement, which, in turn, lead to greater perceived power and subsequently greater relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

We expanded upon our earlier studies by incorporating shared consumer decision making and perceptions of power from both members of the couple. We tested and found support for our hypothesis that, in contrast to when only one

partner makes the decision, shared decision making leads to the highest levels of both self-influence and partner engagement in the decision. Importantly, we find that high levels of both self-influence and partner engagement are necessary to increase perceptions of power and, subsequently, relationship satisfaction.

General Discussion

Individuals often make consumer decisions in the presence of and in collaboration with others. These decisions, particularly those that are made with a relationship partner, can be very different from consumer decisions made by and for the self. Across several studies, which both manipulated and measured shared consumer decision making, and used individual and dyadic data, we find that shared consumer decision making leads to greater satisfaction with the relationship via greater perceptions of power. We further identify how shared decision making leads to these outcomes, combining self-influence with partner engagement, to posit a novel theory about consumer decision making.

Contributions and Implications

The present research highlights an important aspect of consumer decision making—namely, engaging in the process with others—and illustrates some meaningful outcomes of that process. By demonstrating that consumer decision making in interpersonal contexts and across dyads can have beneficial downstream consequences for the relationship, we contribute to the literature on social influences in consumer behavior (e.g., Arora et al., 2011; Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Dzhogleva & Lambertson, 2014; Etkin, 2016; Halevy & Chou, 2014; Hasford et al., 2017; Lambertson, 2016; Lowrey, Otnes, & Ruth, 2004; McFerran et al., 2009; Nikolova et al., 2017; Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2010). Additionally, we show that choosing for and with others has different effects on the relationship, thereby contributing to the growing literature in this area (Liu, Dallas, & Fitzsimons, 2019; Lowe & Haws, 2014; Lowe, Nikolova, Miller, & Dommer, 2019; de Melo, Carnevale, Read, & Gratch, 2014; Polman, 2012; Polman & Vohs, 2016; Steffel & Le Boeuf, 2014).

We contribute to the close relationships literature by highlighting how regular, often mundane choices (e.g., deciding which brand of laundry detergent to buy or which movie to see) can have

important relational consequences, including increased relationship satisfaction. Close relationships, and satisfaction with them, are positively associated with many important life outcomes, including life satisfaction, financial well-being, health and happiness (Berkman, 1995; Cohen, 2004; Keltner et al., 2003; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005; Lang & Carstensen, 1994; Liu 2012; Pieters, 2013; Waite 2001). For example, married people live longer than unmarried people on average (Sbarra, Hasselmo, & Nojopranoto, 2012; Sbarra, Law, & Portley, 2011). Similarly, in a large meta-analytic review, researchers found a 50% increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Understanding how consumer decisions impact close relationships, especially in terms of satisfaction, is thus an important topic for marketing researchers.

We also demonstrate the mechanism through which shared consumer decision making leads to increased relationship satisfaction. Specifically, we find that shared consumer decision making increases perceptions of power in the relationship, characterized by perceptions of both high self-influence and high partner engagement in the decision. In order to perceive greater power, one must believe that one has control over meaningful outcomes, and we posit and find that such meaning comes from partner participation. Furthermore, we find that greater shared consumer decision making is associated with greater perceptions of power across both partners in a couple, highlighting that perceived power is not always zero-sum. In addition, previous research in consumer behavior has focused on how power influences consumer decisions and the outcomes of those decisions (e.g., Brick & Fitzsimons, 2017; Corfman & Lehmann, 1987; Rucker et al., 2012). Here we show how power can be an outcome of consumer decisions. Our findings thus offer insights on social and relational power and consumer behavior (e.g., Brick et al., 2018; Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2017; Keltner et al., 2003; Rucker et al., 2014, 2018).

Moreover, our research offers practical implications for marketers. For example, marketers should consider how consumers are making their purchase decisions and understand whether the decision is being made by an individual or with a partner. In order to encourage greater satisfaction, marketers may wish to emphasize shared consumer decision making for certain purchase decisions. Furthermore, our findings suggest that marketers should be aware of who is consuming the purchase. For

products that are to be shared among partners, the involvement of both individuals in the decision making process is particularly important. For instance, if a couple walks into a car dealership together, the salesclerk could encourage discussion between the couple to motivate shared decision making, which in turn could increase satisfaction and promote positive downstream consequences for the brand.

Future Research

In this research, we focused on close, interdependent relationships in which the two partners were relatively equal in terms of status or standing. Future research could examine consumer decision making in relationships in which there are differences in status and/or structural power between the members. For example, in a parent-child relationship, the parent theoretically has greater structural power. Similarly, within supply chains, one party may have more structural power than another. Does shared decision making lead to greater relationship satisfaction in these types of interdependent relationships? Although we did not explicitly test this question in the current research, we theorize that the answer is yes. This theorizing is in line with research showing that the greater the extent to which employees felt that they were able to participate in decisions with management, the lower was the turnover and the greater was the internalization of the changes, which had “obvious advantages for management and the organization” (Raven, 1993, p. 231, c.f. Coch & French, 1948). These findings, taken in conjunction with those of this research, suggest that there are benefits of shared decision making to both parties regardless of objective power and/or status within the relationship.

We theorized that sharing in the consumer decision process gives the decision meaning regardless of the actual nature of the decision. We provide evidence to support this notion, as we varied the decision type across studies and analyzed the decision type within one of our studies (see MDA Study 5 for further analysis on this point), and we consistently find that shared decision making is associated with greater relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship power. Our findings thus support our theory that it is the decision process, and not the decision context nor the outcome, that influences perceived power and relationship satisfaction. This conclusion is in line with research

showing that “syncretic” relationships (i.e., relationships in which all decisions are shared) are associated with more positive outcomes than “autonomic” relationships (i.e., those in which decisions are divided and each partner assumes responsibility for distinct areas) (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). However, future research could test in greater depth the effects of different types of consumer decisions, including those that vary in consequentiality, weight, or frequency.

The present work focuses on couples making decisions that affect their own relationship (e.g., case 1 in Gorlin & Dhar, 2012). Future research could examine the effects of a shared decision in which the consumption is intended for only one of the individuals in the relationship (e.g., case 3 in Gorlin & Dhar, 2012). In these types of situations, when the outcome only affects one member of the couple, there may be differences depending upon the consequentiality or type of consumer decision. For example, although it might make people more satisfied to have their partner participate in a decision about which car they should purchase for their own use, it might make people feel less power or satisfaction if their partner repeatedly participates in decisions about smaller, everyday things that only they will use, such as what brand of coffee they should consume individually on their way to work.

In this research, we focused on shared consumer decision making, in which both members of the couple take part in the decision process. One might wonder if the positive effect of shared decision making is related solely to spending time or doing an activity with the partner. To examine this question, we conducted an additional exploratory study examining whether differences exist between a shared consumer decision and a shared activity. One hundred sixty-six participants from an online panel recalled either a time when they did an activity with their partner or made a shared decision with their partner. They then completed the same measure of relationship satisfaction used in the main studies. Results revealed that those who recalled a shared decision reported greater relationship satisfaction compared to those who recalled a shared activity ($M_{\text{decision}} = 7.52$, $M_{\text{activity}} = 7.00$; $F(1, 164) = 11.69$, $p = .05$). These results suggest that the shared consumer decision experience is indeed distinct and may increase relationship satisfaction more than other shared activities, such as kayaking or going to the movies together. However, future research in this area could investigate this question further.

Finally, we focused on perceived relationship power and relationship satisfaction in this research, as they directly tie to consumer well-being (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005; Knudson-Martin, 2013). However, relationships are complex phenomena that involve a multitude of processes. Thus, future research could investigate how other outcomes, such as respect toward one’s partner or perceptions of fairness or equity in the relationship, might be influenced by the shared decision process.

Conclusion

Across several studies, we present and find evidence for a novel theory on shared consumer decision making. The present research suggests that making decisions together, even ones as small as which laundry detergent to buy, can increase perceptions of power in the relationship, which in turn can lead to positive outcomes such as increased satisfaction. In fact, our findings consistently show that people feel more powerful, and thus happier, when their partners are involved in decisions that affect the relationship than when they are the sole deciders. Based on these findings, it seems that if you want to be happier in your relationship, perhaps you should go grocery shopping with your partner.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s website:

Appendix S1. Methodological Detail Appendix.