Delegating Decisions: Recruiting Others to Make Difficult Choices

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Despite research showing that people prefer decision autonomy even at cost to themselves when whether or not they are allowed to choose is externally imposed, our work shows that people do opt to let others choose on their behalf when considering choices in prospect, and do so more often when choices feel difficult. In seven experiments, across a variety of real and hypothetical choices, participants were more likely to delegate difficult decisions when choice difficulty was manipulated via relative attractiveness, number of alternatives, format complexity, or font readability, and even when the potential surrogate did not have special expertise pertinent to the decision. We suggest that delegating choices stems from a desire to avoid responsibility for potentially making the wrong choice, as delegation reduced felt responsibility for choice outcomes, and increased under circumstances of high accountability and the possibility of transferring responsibility to another person.
Having the freedom to make choices for oneself is considered by many in our culture to be an unalienable right. Some have suggested that feeling in control of one’s own choices is a fundamental human need (Deci and Ryan 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 preference for choice has found that, even when being responsible for choosing comes at a cost, 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). For example, Botti and Iyengar (2004) showed that participants who were assigned to choose between undesirable alternatives were more dissatisfied with their choice outcome than those who were assigned to have another person choose on their behalf, and yet participants in both groups indicated that they would have preferred choosing themselves than having another person choose for them.

Although it is evident that people highly value freedom of choice and that they prefer to maintain that freedom even when it is costly, it also seems likely that people might sometimes value freedom from choice. Anecdotal examples of people recruiting others to make decisions so that they don’t have to are common: people ask friends to tell them which movie they should see, salesmen to show them which stereo they should buy, and doctors to select which medication they should take. People also formally employ surrogates to make decisions on their behalf. In today’s marketplace, surrogate industries are becoming increasingly 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.

**CHOICE AUTONOMY VERSUS CHOICE AVOIDANCE**

Given the apparent contradiction between people’s preference for choice and the ubiquity of choice delegation in everyday life, it is interesting to consider under what circumstances people might prefer to have others choose on their behalf. A potentially important distinction between how preference for choice is typically studied and everyday examples of choice delegation is that, in the preference for choice literature, whether participants choose themselves or have another person choose on their behalf is typically externally imposed. The fact that participants who were assigned to have another person choose on their behalf were deprived of their freedom to choose could explain why they indicated that they would have preferred to have chosen themselves even when having another person choose on their behalf led them to feel more satisfied with the choice outcomes. Thus, although the preference for choice literature shows that people prefer choosing themselves when who gets to make the final choice is externally dictated, even when faced difficult decisions such as those between options with negative or tragic consequences, it is possible that people might actively choose to cede decision control to others when considering difficult decisions in prospect.

Indeed, we hypothesize that consumers will delegate decisions to other people, and that they are especially likely to do so when choices feel difficult. Choice difficulty increases preference uncertainty and undermines confidence that the best option will be selected (Dhar 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Dhar and Nowlis 1999; Dhar, Nowlis, and Sherman 1999). Increasing
preference uncertainty is likely to heighten concerns about choosing suboptimally, and may lead people to seek out ways of avoiding responsibility for potentially making the wrong choice. Indeed, research on choice avoidance shows that people often cope with difficult decisions by avoiding them: they defer them to a later point in time, retain status quo or default options, or opt not to choose anything at all (for a review, see Anderson 2003). Thus far, research on choice avoidance has largely focused on the individual making the choice, rather than the social context in which they might be making that choice, and consequently has neglected to consider delegation as a potentially appealing strategy for avoiding the responsibility of decision-making. In what follows, we will briefly review the literature on choice avoidance and consider why people might be prone to delegate when choices feel difficult.

**DELEGATING DIFFICULT CHOICES**

Choice difficulty has been shown to lead to a variety of forms of choice avoidance (for a review, see Anderson 2003). One form of choice avoidance is simply deferring difficult choices to a later point in time (Dhar 1997a; Dhar and Nowlis 1999; Luce 1998; Novemsky et al. 2007; Tversky and Shafir 1992). For example, Tversky and Shafir (1992) manipulated choice difficulty by varying the relative attractiveness of choice options and found that participants were more likely to continue searching for alternatives when options were similar in attractiveness. Similarly, Novemsky et al. (2007) found that choice deferral increased when choice options were presented in a difficult-to-read font. Another method by which people avoid difficult decisions is via retaining a status quo or default option (Luce 1998; Redelmeier and Shafir 1995; Tversky and Shafir 1992) or by opting not to choose anything at all (Dhar 1997b; Iyengar and Lepper 2000). For example, Redelmeier and Shafir (1995) presented physicians with a choice about whether to medicate a patient and varied choice difficulty by suggesting either one or two possible
medications. Physicians were more likely to retain the default—no medication—when two medications were suggested. As another example, grocery shoppers who were presented with a large array of jams were less likely to purchase jam than those presented with a smaller, more manageable array of jams (Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

One of the leading explanations for why choice difficulty leads to choice avoidance in general, and why it might lead to choice delegation in particular, is that it undermines confidence that the best option will be selected (Dhar 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Dhar and Nowlis 1999; Dhar, Nowlis, and Sherman 1999). When people’s confidence in undermined, choice avoidance is likely to increase because it allows people to avoid responsibility for potentially making the wrong choice. The desire to avoid being responsible for making a suboptimal choice has been suggested as one of the reasons why people engage in choice avoidance strategies such as choosing a status quo or default option (Baron and Ritov 1994). These decision avoidance strategies allow people to avoid responsibility for choice outcomes but require that they forfeit the benefits of obtaining a chosen option. Compared to these forms of choice avoidance, choice delegation may provide an especially attractive option when choices are difficult because it enables people to avoid being responsible for potentially choosing the wrong option while allowing them to reap the benefits of obtaining a chosen option and even potentially profit from others’ expertise.

There is some correlational evidence to suggest that people might be more likely to delegate when choices feel difficult. Tetlock and Boettger (1994) found a significant 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) performed a cluster analysis on consumers who utilized a wardrobe consultant and found that the group of consumers 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). Together, these findings are consistent with the notion that, as choice difficulty increases, people may be more likely to seek out decision support.

**THE PRESENT RESEARCH**

The current research explores when people voluntarily cede decision control to other people. Seven experiments demonstrate that consumers are more likely to delegate choices to other people when choices feel difficult so that they may avoid responsibility for potentially making the wrong decision. Study 1 tests the hypothesis that consumers are more likely to delegate choices that feel difficult than choices that feel easy, and are more comfortable having others choose for them when it is their decision to do so than when it is imposed upon them. Studies 2a and 2b manipulate choice difficulty superficially via fluency (i.e., format complexity and font readability) to isolate the feeling of choice difficulty as a sufficient catalyst for choice delegation. Studies 3a and 3b assess whether delegating difficult choices enables people to feel less responsible for the choice outcomes. Additionally, study 3a explores whether delegation is predicated on expertise or whether it is a broader phenomenon such that people are willing to delegate difficult decisions even when the potential surrogate does not have special expertise pertinent to the choice. Studies 4 and 5 examine the role of responsibility in the delegation of difficult choices: study 4 examines whether people are more likely to delegate choices when others will assume responsibility for the decision, and study 5 tests whether people are more likely to delegate choices when they are responsible for other people’s outcomes rather than only their own outcomes.
We operationalize choice difficulty as the feeling of ease or difficulty associated with a choice. 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 fluent the choice options are to perceive. 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, format complexity, and font readability.

The current research contributes to the literature on preference for choice by showing that, although people prefer choosing themselves when reflecting back on difficult choices in which the person who ultimately made the choice was externally imposed, they are willing to voluntarily cede decision control to others when faced with difficult decisions in prospect. It also extends the literature on choice avoidance by identifying choice delegation as a viable strategy for avoiding responsibility for a choice without avoiding the decision altogether and by showing that valuable insights may be gleaned from studying choice in a broader social context. Finally, the present research also contributes to the marketing literature on surrogate usage. Past work on surrogate usage has been mostly limited to transactions in which wealthy consumers formally employ
professional agents to make shopping decisions on their behalf: namely, working women hiring wardrobe consultants (Forsythe, Butler, and Schaefer 1990; Fuller and Blackwell 1992; Solomon 1987), homeowners hiring interior decorators (Pratt 1981), and investors hiring financial advisers (Stern, Solomon, and Stinerock 1992; Stinerock, Stern, and Solomon 1991). The present work shows that surrogate usage is not predicated on expertise or confined to a particular demographic or formal interaction. Further, whereas past work on surrogate usage has been largely descriptive in nature, the present research experimentally explores the causal antecedents of surrogate usage.

STUDY 1: DELEGATION VERSUS PREFERENCE FOR CHOICE

Although past research shows that people prefer decision autonomy when whether or not they are allowed to choose is externally imposed, we propose that people do at times opt to let others choose on their behalf when considering choices in prospect, and do so more often when choices feel difficult. Study 1 sought to show that a significant proportion of people will opt to let another person choose for them when they have the freedom to do so, and that this proportion is greater than those who say they would prefer to do so when they were assigned either to choose themselves or to have someone else make the choice on their behalf. Further, we explored whether choice difficulty influences people’s propensity to delegate choices to other people when given the option to do so but does not influence their preference for choice autonomy if they were assigned to make the choice or have someone else make it. In this study, participants were invited to participate in a taste test of gourmet jelly beans. Choice difficulty was manipulated by presenting participants with a small or large array of jelly bean flavors from which to choose (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). Some participants were given the option to decide whether they would rather pick the jelly bean flavor they would taste or have the experimenter choose which flavor they would taste. Others were randomly assigned either to choose which flavor they would
taste or to have the experimenter choose which flavor they would taste; afterward, they were asked to indicate whether they would have preferred to have chosen themselves or to have had the experimenter choose on their behalf. We believed that participants would be more inclined to allow someone else to choose on their behalf when it was their option to do so than when the person who made the choice was assigned. We further predicted that participants who were given the option of deciding whether to choose or delegate would be more likely to delegate when presented with a large array of flavors, but that those who were not given the option of choosing or delegating would indicate that they would have preferred to have chosen themselves regardless of the number of alternatives.

**Method**

*Participants.* Volunteers (*N* = 168) were recruited on campus at a large southeastern university to participate in our study in exchange for the opportunity to taste a gourmet jelly bean. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 54, with a mean age of 24. Fifty-two were male, and 116 were female. One hundred six were White, 24 were Black, 16 were Hispanic, 9 were Asian, 9 were of another ethnicity, and 4 did not specify their ethnicity.

*Procedure.* Participants were invited to participate in a taste test of Jelly Belly brand gourmet jelly beans. They were randomly assigned to an *optional choice* condition, a *self choice* condition, or an *experimenter choice* condition. All participants began the experiment by briefly examining a menu of jelly bean flavors that were available to taste. Participants in the *optional choice* condition were asked, “Would you like to choose which flavor you will taste? Or, would you like for me to choose a flavor for you?” Participants in the *self choice* condition were asked to choose which flavor they would like to taste, and, once they had chosen, they were asked, “In this situation, you chose which flavor you would like to taste. In which of the following situations do
you think you would have felt happier: If you chose which flavor you would taste or if I chose which flavor you would taste?” Participants in the experimenter choice condition were told, “I will choose which jelly bean you will taste” (the jelly bean flavor assigned to them was yoked to that picked by the previous participant who had chosen themselves), and, once the experimenter told the participant which flavor they would taste, they were asked, “In this situation, I chose which flavor you would taste. In which of the following situations do you think you would have felt happier: If you chose which flavor you would taste or if I chose which flavor you would taste?” 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 6 flavors (small set condition) or 35 flavors (large set condition). The flavors in the small array were randomly selected from the flavors in the large array and consisted of Berry Blue, Pomegranate, Strawberry Cheesecake, Tangerine, Very Cherry, and Watermelon. The flavors in the large array were these six plus 7-UP, A&W Cream Soda, Apple Pie, Blueberry, Caramel Corn, Chocolate Pudding, Cotton Candy, French Vanilla, Green Apple, Honey Bean, Island Punch, Juicy Pear, Kiwi, Lemon Drop, Mango, Margarita, Mojito, Orange Juice, Orange Sherbet, Peach Bellini, Piña Colada, Pink Grapefruit, Plum Perfect, Raspberry, Red Apple, Strawberry Daiquiri, Strawberry Jam, Top Banana, and Tutti Frutti. In a pre-test, 33 participants from Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk, an online forum where volunteers complete surveys in exchange for credit toward Amazon.com products, were shown both menus and, for each, 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 they
thought it would be easier to decide which jelly bean to taste from the small menu ($M = 3.21, SD = 2.58$) than from the large menu ($M = 6.03, SD = 2.96$; paired $t(32) = 4.27, p < .001, d = 1.02$).

**Results**

We hypothesized that participants who were given the option of choosing or delegating the choice of which jelly bean to taste would be more likely to delegate, and especially so when presented with a large array of flavors, but that those who were not given the option of choosing or delegating would indicate that they would have preferred to have chosen themselves regardless of the number of alternatives. To test this hypothesis, we performed a logistic regression with condition (optional choice, self choice, or experimenter choice) and number of alternatives (small set or large set) on preferences for choosing or having another person choose on one’s behalf.

Condition was coded such that the optional choice condition was contrasted with the self choice and experimenter choice conditions. This analysis yielded a significant effect of condition (Wald’s $\chi^2 = 19.68, p < .001, \text{Odds Ratio} = 1.79$), such that participants were more likely to prefer having another person choose on their behalf in the optional choice condition than in the self choice or experimenter choice conditions, a nonsignificant effect of number of alternatives (Wald’s $\chi^2 = 1.46, p = .23, \text{Odds Ratio} = 1.29$), and importantly, a significant interaction between condition and number of alternatives (Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.36, p < .05, \text{Odds Ratio} = 1.32$).

As can be seen in figure 1, consistent with our predictions, participants who were given the option to choose which jelly bean flavor they would taste or have the experimenter choose a flavor on their behalf were more likely to delegate in the large array condition than in the small array condition, ($\chi^2(1, N = 64) = 10.72, p = .001, \phi = 1.34$): 67% of participants in the large array condition preferred to delegate to the experimenter, whereas only 26% of those in the small array condition delegated. Regardless of choice difficulty, only a small minority of participants who
had been assigned to choose themselves or to have the experimenter choose on their behalf indicated that they would have preferred to have had the experimenter choose which jelly bean flavor they would taste, (15% versus 20%, $\chi^2(1, N = 51) = .19, p = .67, \phi = .03$, and 11% versus 8%, $\chi^2(1, N = 53) = .11, p = .74, \phi = .02$, respectively).

Discussion

Study 1 shows that people who are given the option of choosing or delegating are more likely to delegate when choices feel difficult, but that people prefer decision autonomy regardless of choice difficulty when whether or not they are allowed to choose is externally imposed. Specifically, participants who had the freedom to either choose themselves or delegate the choice of which jelly bean to sample in a taste test were more likely to delegate the decision to the experimenter when presented with a large array of jelly bean flavors, but those who were assigned to either choose themselves or let another person choose for them indicated that they would have preferred to have chosen themselves regardless of the number of alternatives. Now that we have established experimentally that people do choose to delegate decisions with some regularity, and do so more often when the choices they face are difficult, we will explore what underlies the decision to delegate a difficult choice. Whereas in this study choice difficulty was manipulated via the number of alternatives, in the next studies, we will manipulate choice difficulty superficially via fluency to explore whether heightening the feeling of choice difficulty increases choice delegation even when the content of the choices is held constant.

STUDIES 2A AND 2B: DELEGATION RISES WHEN CHOICES FEEL DIFFICULT
To isolate the feeling of choice difficulty as a sufficient catalyst for choice delegation, we manipulated choice difficulty superficially via fluency, namely format complexity (study 2a) and font readability (study 2b), and gave participants the option of choosing themselves or delegating the choice to another person. In study 2a, participants were presented with a choice between heartburn medications and were provided with information about the medications in a simple table format or a dense paragraph format. Participants indicated whether they would choose a medication themselves or delegate their decision to the pharmacist. We predicted that participants would be more likely to delegate their choice of heartburn medication to the pharmacist when the characteristics of each medication were difficult to ascertain from a dense paragraph, and thus the decision felt more difficult, than when they were easy to ascertain from a simple table.

In study 2b, given that format complexity could influence more than just the perceived difficulty of a decision (e.g., by changing search order or information processing strategies), we manipulated difficulty in a more subtle manner via font readability (e.g., Novemsky et al. 2007; Simmons and Nelson 2006). Participants were presented with a choice between entrées from a restaurant menu that was written either in either an easy-to-read font or a difficult-to-read font. Participants indicated whether they would choose an entrée themselves or delegate their decision to the waiter. We predicted that participants would be more likely to delegate their choice of entrée to the waiter when the font was difficult to read than when it was easy to read.

Study 2a Method

Participants. Participants (N = 40) were recruited to fill out an online survey via Mechanical Turk. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60, with a mean age of 34. Eight were male, and 32 were female. Thirty-one were White, 7 were Asian, and 2 were Black. The survey
took about two minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with $0.15 Amazon.com credit.

Procedure. Participants were informed that the experiment was about how people choose medications at a pharmacy. They were provided with the following scenario:

Imagine that in the past couple of weeks you’ve had several bouts of heartburn. You feel a burning chest pain after you eat, and it gets worse when you lie down or bend over.

You are shopping for a heartburn remedy to alleviate your symptoms. You talk over the decision with a pharmacist, who provides you with [some] information.

Participants were presented with information about three types of over-the-counter heartburn medications—antacids, acid reducers, and proton-pump inhibitors—and the typical brands, instructions, relief duration, and potential side effects for each type of medication. In the easy condition information was provided in a clear, organized table format, whereas in the difficult condition the same information was presented in a dense paragraph format (See appendix A for materials). In a pre-test, 24 participants from Mechanical Turk were shown both presentation formats and were asked to rate how easy or difficult each was to use on a scale ranging from 1 = very easy to 10 = very difficult. Participants rated the table format as easier to use ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .70$) than the paragraph format ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.04$; paired $t(23) = 11.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 9.25$).

Participants were told that the pharmacist said that some of these drugs might be a better fit for some people than others, but that the pharmacist would be glad to choose a drug for them if they thought it would be helpful. Participants then indicated whether they would want to: A) consider their options and purchase whichever medication they thought was best, and name what
it was, or B) tell the pharmacist which of the options they were considering and purchase whichever medication the pharmacist thought was best.

Study 2a Results

Participants were more likely to delegate their choice of heartburn medication to the pharmacist in the difficult condition than in the easy condition ($\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 6.47, p = .01, \phi = 1.02$): 65% of participants delegated to the pharmacist when information about the heartburn medications was presented in a dense paragraph format, whereas only 25% of participants delegated when the same information was presented in a simple table format. In other words, this study provides initial evidence that, as with other methods of choice avoidance, consumers are more likely to delegate choices that feel difficult than ones that feel easy.

Study 2b Method

Participants. Undergraduates ($N = 67$) at a large southeastern university participated in exchange for extra course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 42, with a mean age of 20. Forty were male, and 27 were female. Forty-four were White, 4 were Black, 6 were Asian, and 13 were Hispanic.

Procedure. Participants were informed that the experiment was about how people order at restaurants. They were given a 12-item menu to look over and were asked to examine the menu as if they were choosing what to order. The twelve dishes they were to choose from were written in an easy-to-read 12-point font, Cambria (fluent condition), or a difficult-to-read 12-point font, Edwardian Script ITC (disfluent condition; see appendix B 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 they had examined the menu, they indicated whether they would want to: A) choose an entrée themselves, and name what it was, or B) tell the waiter which options they were considering and order what the waiter recommended.

Study 2b Results

Participants were more likely to delegate their choice of entrée to the waiter when the menu was written in a hard-to-read font than in an easy-to-read font, ($\chi^2(1, N = 67) = 6.33$, $p = .01$, $\phi = .77$): 42% of participants in the disfluent condition delegated to the waiter, whereas only 15% of participants in the fluent condition delegated. Thus, even with a more 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 more fluent format.

Discussion

Studies 2a and 2b show that the feeling of choice difficulty is a sufficient catalyst for choice delegation. Participants were more likely to delegate decisions to other people when choice difficulty was manipulated superficially via fluency: Participants were more likely to delegate a choice of medication to a pharmacist when relevant information was presented in a difficult-to-process format and a choice of entrée to a waiter when the menu was in a hard-to-read font.

One reason why people delegate difficult decisions may be to avoid feeling responsible for potentially making the wrong choice. Before exploring whether avoiding responsibility motivates delegation, we first sought to establish that delegation indeed enables people to feel less responsible for the choice outcome. Given that delegation involves voluntarily choosing to cede decision control to another person, if the decision were to turn out poorly, people who delegate
might still feel responsible for the choice made by the person to whom they delegated. After all, they chose to let that person make the decision when they could have chosen to make the decision themselves. To examine whether delegating a decision to another person actually enables people to feel less responsible for the choice outcome, we assessed how responsible participants felt for the decision outcome after providing them with the opportunity to choose themselves or delegate the decision to another person (study 3a) or manipulating whether they were assigned to imagine that they chose themselves or delegated (study 3b).

Given the costs of giving up decision autonomy, it is possible that people might delegate only when they could gain expertise from their surrogate. Thus, an additional aim of study 3a was to explore whether consumers delegate even when the potential surrogate does not have special expertise pertinent to the decision. In studies 2a and 2b, participants were presented with potential surrogates whose jobs required them to know a great deal of information about the options, and who thus possessed greater expertise than the consumer had. Past research on choice delegation in marketing has focused almost exclusively on interactions between consumers and more expert surrogates (for an exception, see Cornwall and Gabel 1996). We suggest that choice delegation is a much broader phenomenon that is not predicated solely on expertise. 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 still achieves this function.

STUDIES 3A AND 3B: DELEGATION REDUCES RESPONSIBILITY

Studies 3a and 3b examined whether choice delegation is associated with a reduced sense of responsibility for the decision outcome. Additionally, study 3a explored whether people delegate difficult decisions even when the potential surrogate is not an expert. In study 3a, participants were asked to imagine trying to choose a movie to rent. Choice difficulty was
manipulated via the relative attractiveness of the available options: participants were presented with 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 to the participant. Participants were told that a friend who had not seen either of the movies offered to help them make the decision. Then participants indicated whether they would choose a movie on their own or rent the movie that their friend selected. Finally, participants were asked about the degree to which they would feel responsible for the outcome of the decision. To show that delegation actually causes people to feel less responsible for choice outcomes, in study 3b, we manipulated whether participants chose the movie themselves or delegated the choice, by having them imagine making the decision one way or the other. We predicted that participants would be more likely to delegate their choice of movie to their friend when the two movies were similar in attractiveness and that participants who delegated would feel less responsible for the outcome of the decision than those who chose themselves, regardless of whether they personally opted to delegate or were assigned to imagine that they delegated their choice.

Study 3a Method

*Participants.* Participants (*N* = 79) were recruited to fill out an online survey via Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were invited to participate. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 62, with a mean age of 37. Thirty-three were male, 44 were female, and 2 did not specify their gender. Sixty-five were White, 5 were Black, 4 were Asian, 3 were Hispanic, 1 was of another ethnicity, and 1 did not indicate any ethnicity. The survey took about three minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with $0.15 Amazon.com credit.
Procedure. Participants were informed that the experiment was about how people choose movies to watch. They were provided with the following scenario:

Imagine that one day after work you are interested in renting a movie to watch that evening. You and a friend go to a movie rental kiosk so that you can rent a movie. Your friend won’t be able to watch the movie with you, but they came along anyway because they are helping you with another errand.

This night you would like to feel a little cultured, and so you are particularly interested in watching a foreign film. Below are the movies the kiosk normally carries that fit that category. They are all in a foreign language with English subtitles; the original language is in italics at the end of each movie’s description.

Participants were presented with a list of 10 recent foreign films: *Coco Before Chanel, Departures, Dogtooth, Entre Nos, I Am Love, John Rabe, My Name is Khan, Paris, Udaan,* and *Women Without Men*. Foreign films were chosen to minimize the likelihood that participants would be familiar with the movies. Indeed, 89% 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 $1 = \text{very easy}$ to $10 = \text{very difficult}$. 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 were told:

Think about how much you would like to watch each movie. Imagine that you haven’t seen either of them, and you only have time to watch one movie tonight or even in the next few days. You aren’t interested in switching to a different category of movie; you have decided you are going to watch a foreign film. You’ll have to make a choice of which one of these two movies to watch.

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. You can tell me what you think of it.”

Participants were asked to indicate whether they would want to: A) choose which of the two movies they would rent on their own, and name what it was, or B) ask their friend which of these two movies they think they should rent, and rent that one. Finally, to determine whether participants who delegated would feel less responsible for the choice outcome than those who
chose themselves, on a separate page, participants were asked, “How responsible would you feel for the outcome of this decision if you didn’t enjoy the movie you ended up renting?,” on a scale ranging from 1 = not at all responsible to 7 = completely responsible.

Study 3a Results

As predicted, delegation was not predicated on expertise: participants were more likely to delegate difficult choices even when the potential surrogate did not have greater expertise than they did. Participants were more likely to delegate their choice of movie to a friend who had not seen any of the movies when the available movies were closer in relative attractiveness, \( \chi^2(1, N = 79) = 4.56, p < .05, \phi = .51 \). Thirty-six percent of participants delegated when the available options were their fourth- and fifth-most preferred movies, whereas only 15% delegated when the available options were their fourth- and tenth-most preferred movies.

To examine whether choice delegation was associated with less felt responsibility for the choice outcome, we performed an ANOVA of choice difficulty (easy or difficult) and choice strategy (choose or delegate) on the extent to which participants thought they would feel responsible for the outcome of the decision if they didn’t enjoy the movie they ended up renting. As predicted, participants who delegated felt less personally responsible for the outcome of the decision \( (M = 4.40, SD = 1.22) \) than those who chose themselves, \( (M = 6.07, SD = 1.30; F(1, 75) = 27.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27) \). Felt responsibility for the choice outcome was unaffected by condition, \( (F(1, 75) = .53, p = .47, \eta^2 = .007) \), or the interaction between condition and choice strategy, \( (F(1, 75) = .22, p = .64, \eta^2 = .003) \).

We next performed a mediation analysis to test the indirect path from choice difficulty to delegation to felt responsibility. Indeed, choice difficulty was significantly associated with increased delegation \( (\beta = .21, t = 2.17, p < .05) \), and delegation was significantly associated with a
decreased sense of felt responsibility ($\beta = -1.81, t = -5.30, p < .001$). Bootstrapping procedures (Preacher and Hayes 2008) indicated that this indirect path was significant (95% CI = -.84 to -.06). Neither the total effect nor the direct effect of choice difficulty on felt responsibility was significant, ($\beta = -.21, t = -.63, p = .53; \beta = .17, t = .56, p = .58$, respectively), meaning that the mediation was indirect-only (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010). This suggests that differences in felt responsibility for the choice outcomes may not directly follow from choice difficulty, but rather, may depend upon how people choose to cope with difficult decisions.

Study 3b Method

*Participants.* Participants ($N = 53$) were recruited to fill out an online survey via Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were invited to participate. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 72, with a mean age of 36. Eighteen were male, and 35 were female. Thirty-nine were White, 5 were Black, 5 were Asian, 3 were Hispanic, and 1 was of another ethnicity. The survey took about three minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with $0.15 Amazon.com credit.

*Procedure.* To show that delegation actually causes people to feel less responsible for choice outcomes, study 3b followed the same procedure as study 3a, except that in this study all participants were presented with a choice between their fourth- and fifth-ranked movies, and we manipulated whether participants were asked to imagine that they opted to choose themselves or delegate. In the *choose* condition, participants were told that their friend offered to help them pick a movie, but that they responded by declining the offer and choosing which movie to rent on their own. Participants were then instructed to write the name of the movie they would choose. In the *delegate* condition, participants were told that they accepted their friend’s offer to help them choose a movie and rented the movie their friend thought they should choose. Then, participants...
were told that their friend chose whichever movie they had ranked more favorably on their behalf. Finally, as in study 3a, participants indicated how responsible they would feel if they didn’t enjoy the movie \( (1 = \textit{not at all responsible} \text{ to } 7 = \textit{completely responsible}) \).

**Study 3b Results**

Consistent with our predictions, participants who were told that they opted to delegate their choice of movie to a friend thought that they would feel less responsible for the outcome of the decision if they didn’t enjoy the movie they ended up renting \( (M = 4.35, SD = 1.67) \) than did those who were told that they opted to choose themselves, \( (M = 5.67, SD = 1.84; t(51) = 2.73, p < .01, d = .75) \). Thus, participants felt less responsible for the choice outcomes when they delegated to a friend than when they chose themselves both when the decision to delegate was self determined and when it was experimentally manipulated.

Studies 3a and 3b suggest that one reason why people may prefer to delegate difficult decisions rather than choose themselves is that it allows them to avoid feeling responsible for making the wrong decision. The next two studies examine implications of the delegation-responsibility link. If participants anticipate that delegation will help relieve them of responsibility for the outcome of a difficult choice, certain circumstances should make them especially likely or unlikely to delegate. In study 4 we examined whether people are less likely to delegate when delegating will not absolve them of responsibility for the choice outcome, and in study 5 we examined whether people are more likely to delegate when responsibility is increased, namely, when they are responsible for making a choice on behalf of other people.

**STUDY 4: DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY**

To examine the role of responsibility in choice delegation, in study 4, we asked participants to imagine that they were an assistant manager at a small brokerage firm, tasked with
deciding in which stock to place an important client’s first investment. They were told that the client had identified three stocks that they would like their firm to choose between, and that they could either choose a stock themselves or delegate the choice to another person.

Participants were either told that, should they opt to delegate the decision, they themselves or the person to whom they delegated would be entirely responsible for the success or failure of the investment. Additionally, to explore another factor that might impact felt responsibility in an organizational setting, we manipulated whether the person to whom they could delegate was their boss or one of the brokers they supervised. The hierarchical relationship between a person and the potential surrogate may influence whether a person feels that they can avoid responsibility for a decision by delegating to that person. Namely, a person may feel responsible for a decision made by an employee who they are responsible for supervising regardless of who will be officially held accountable for the decision outcome. Thus, the only case in which a person may feel that they can truly be absolved of responsibility for a decision is when they delegate to a superior who will assume responsibility for the decision.

We predicted that participants would be more likely to delegate when they were told that the person to whom they delegated would assume responsibility for the success or failure of the investment than when they were told that they themselves would remain responsible. We further predicted that participants would be most likely to delegate when the potential surrogate was a superior who would assume responsibility for the decision, the one case in which they could truly feel absolved of responsibility.

Method

Participants. Undergraduates (N = 181) at a large southeastern university participated in exchange for extra course credit.
Procedure. To examine the role of responsibility in choice delegation, we asked participants to imagine that they were an assistant manager at a small brokerage firm. Participants were told that they had worked their way up so that they supervised several junior brokers, although they still reported to the owner and founder of the firm. They were told that the firm was tasked with deciding in which stock to place an important client’s first $1 million investment, and that the client would decide whether or not to invest more money with the firm based on the stock’s performance over the next six months.

Participants were told that there were three stocks that the client would like their firm to choose between. The stocks were fictional and balanced for positive and negative attributes in order to increase decision difficulty:

**Opus.** This is a new computer software firm; their stock just went public. Not much is known about them, but some analysts think their stock may double in price over the next two years. Others are much less sure of its prospects.

**HTS Services.** This wireless communications company has posted reliable stock price increases for the last two years; it has historically made investors a respectable amount money off their investment. However, there is a good chance that a new competitor in the market could have an impact on their performance.

**Huron Medical.** This pharmaceutical company’s stock price has taken a dip over the last few months, but there are occasional rumors that they are about to release a new cholesterol medication that could earn them billions of dollars.

Participants were told that they, as assistant manager, could either choose a stock themselves (and indicate which stock they chose) or delegate the choice to another person. They were told that either they (in the *self-responsible* conditions) or the person to whom they
delegated (in the other-responsible conditions) would be entirely responsible for the success or failure of the investment. Additionally, participants were told that the person to whom they could delegate was either their boss (superior-surrogate conditions) or one of the brokers they supervised (subordinate-surrogate conditions).

Results and Discussion

As can be seen in figure 2, consistent with the hypothesis that people delegate choices to avoid potentially being responsible for making the wrong decision, participants were more likely to delegate when they were told that the person to whom they delegated would be responsible for the decision outcome (30%) than when they were told that they themselves would be responsible (16%; Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.97, p < .05$, Odds Ratio = 2.42). The main effect of surrogate status on delegation was not significant, (Wald’s $\chi^2 = .40, p = .84$, Odds Ratio = 1.08).

As predicted, there was a significant interaction between surrogate status and responsibility, (Wald’s $\chi^2 = 7.36, p < .005$, Odds Ratio = 2.94), such that participants were more likely to delegate to their boss when they were told that the boss would be responsible for the decision outcome (40%) than when they were told that they themselves would be responsible (9%; $\chi^2(1, N = 93) = 12.57, p < .001, \phi = 1.30$), but they were equally likely to delegate to one of the brokers they supervised regardless of whether they were told that they (23%) or their employee (20%) would be responsible, ($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = .14, p = .71, \phi = .01$). A contrast analysis (Rosenthal and Rosnow 1985) indicated that participants were more likely to delegate to their boss when the boss would be responsible, the one case in which they could be absolved of all responsibility, than in any of the other conditions ($z = 2.88, p < .005$).

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Insert figure 2 about here
In a follow-up study, 52 participants recruited through Mechanical Turk indicated how responsible they would feel for the outcome of the decision in one of the four conditions, supposing that they decided to delegate their decision. There was a significant main effect of the person to whom participants delegated, \( F(1, 48) = 4.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09 \); of whether the participant retained or ceded responsibility, \( F(1, 48) = 5.50, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10 \), and importantly, an interaction between the two factors, \( F(1, 48) = 5.30, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10 \). Participants believed that they would feel less responsible when they delegated to their boss and ceded responsibility \((M = 4.00, SD = 1.96)\) than when they delegated to one of the brokers they supervised and retained responsibility \((M = 5.94, SD = 1.48; t(28) = 3.11, p < .005, d = 1.15)\), when they delegated to one of their brokers and ceded responsibility \((M = 5.92, SD = 1.15; t(19.05) = 3.08, p < .01, d = 1.25)\), and when they delegated to their boss and retained responsibility \((M = 6.00, SD = 1.32; t(19.99) = 2.66, p < .05, d = 1.17)\). The latter three conditions did not vary from each other (all \( p > .90 \)). These follow-up results suggest that the reason why delegation was greatest in the condition where participants could delegate to their boss and cede responsibility to him is because it was the only condition in which participants felt that they could actually be rid of responsibility for the decision outcome if they delegated.

Whereas the studies prior to this one involved personal decisions that only had consequences for the participants themselves, this study involved a decision that would not only affect the participant but also the firm for which they worked. If people delegate choices to avoid potentially being responsible for making the wrong decision, then they might be especially likely to delegate choices when they are responsible for other people’s outcomes instead of merely their
own. In the next study, we explore whether people are more likely to delegate choices when they are responsible for others’ outcomes rather than only their own outcomes.

**STUDY 5: DELEGATING CHOICES FOR SELF OR OTHERS**

There are many occasions in which people may be responsible for others’ outcomes instead of merely their own. Parents make decisions on behalf of their households, managers make decisions on behalf of their employees, doctors make decisions on behalf of their patients, and politicians make decisions on behalf of their constituents, to name a few. This heightened sense of accountability can make such decisions more emotionally stressful (Zikmund-Fisher et al. 2006), and may exacerbate the desire to avoid potentially being responsible for making the wrong decision. Consistent with this, Tetlock and Boettger (1994) show that the more people have concerns about being held accountable for a decision, the more likely they are to want to have another party review and possibly change that decision.

To test whether people are more likely to delegate choices when they are responsible for others’ outcomes rather than only their own outcomes, in study 5, participants imagined either that they were selecting an entrée for themselves or on behalf of guests at a catered event from a menu written in an easy-to-read or hard-to-read font. Participants indicated whether they would choose an entrée themselves or delegate the decision to a caterer. In addition, since we did not vary choice difficulty in the previous study, it remains an open question how difficulty and the responsibility of choosing for others might interact. One possible result is an interaction such that participants making a personal decision that feels easy might be less likely to delegate than participants in the other three conditions, which will all heighten concerns about being responsible for potentially making the wrong choice. Another possible result is that both choice difficulty and responsibility might each independently and additively impact delegation, such that
participants will be most likely to delegate when they are making a difficult choice on behalf of others. Study 5 will investigate these possibilities.

Method

Participants. Participants \((N = 129)\) were recruited to fill out an online survey via Mechanical Turk. Only participants who had an approval rate of 95% or higher and lived in the United States were invited to participate. Fifty-five were male and 89 were female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 with a mean age of 38. One-hundred-eight participants were White, seven were Black, 10 were Asian, and one was Hispanic. The survey took about two minutes to complete, and participants were compensated with $0.15 Amazon.com credit.

Procedure. Participants were assigned to either the choosing-for-self condition, in which they imagined that they were selecting an entrée for themselves at a catered event, or the choosing-for-others condition, where they imagined that they were choosing an entrée on behalf of their guests at a such an event. They chose these entrées from a menu that was written in a fluent or disfluent font (the same menus that were used in study 2b; see appendix B). Participants indicated whether they would A) choose the entrée themselves, or B) tell the caterer which options they were considering and order what the caterer recommended.

Results and Discussion

As can be seen in figure 3, consistent with the idea that consumers should be especially likely to delegate decisions when they feel responsible not only for their own outcomes but also other people’s outcomes, participants were more likely to delegate their choice of entrée to a caterer when they were choosing on behalf of others (39%) than for themselves only (20%; Wald’s \(\chi^2 = 6.19, p = .01, \text{Odds Ratio} = 2.99\)). Additionally, as in previous studies, participants were more likely to delegate in the disfluent condition (38%) than in the fluent condition (22%);
Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.69, p < .05, \text{Odds Ratio} = 2.60$), regardless of who would be affected by the choice outcome. The interaction between fluency and responsibility (i.e., choosing for self or choosing for others) was not significant, ($\text{Wald’s } \chi^2 = 1.61, p = .21, \text{Odds Ratio} = 1.75$). Thus, participants were more likely to delegate when choices were difficult and when they were choosing on behalf of other people.

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Insert figure 3 about here

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**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This research shows that consumers cope with difficult decisions by delegating them to other people. Across seven experiments, participants were more likely to ask others to choose on their behalf when choices felt difficult than when they felt easy. Participants were willing to delegate a variety of hypothetical and real choices: decisions about what jelly bean to taste, what medication to take, what entrée to order, what movie to rent, or in what stock to invest. Delegation increased when choices felt difficult regardless of whether that feeling was instantiated via relative attractiveness, number of alternatives, format complexity, or font readability, and persisted regardless of whether the potential surrogate was an expert (i.e., as in the case of a pharmacist choosing a medication or a caterer choosing an entrée) or a non-expert (i.e., as in the case of a friend selecting a movie from a set of movies they had not seen).

Our findings suggest that the tendency to delegate difficult choices is rooted in the desire to avoid being responsible for potentially making the wrong choice. Participants reported feeling less responsible for the outcome of their choice when they delegated than when they chose themselves both when they personally opted to delegate and when they were assigned to imagine
that they delegated. Furthermore, delegation decreased when responsibility for the decision outcome would not be transferred to another person, compared to when it would. Finally, when responsibility was greater—that is, when people were responsible for other people’s outcomes rather than merely their own—people were more likely to delegate. Together, these studies demonstrate that, when finding the right option and taking responsibility for the choice is too much to bear, people may opt to let others choose for them.

Directions for Future Research

An interesting direction for future research would be to explore the extent to which the present findings with regard to choice difficulty and felt responsibility generalize to advice seeking and under what conditions people might prefer delegation versus advice. Currently, little is known about the factors that influence advice seeking, as research on advice has traditionally focused on the factors that influence the weight people place on advice they have already received (for a review, see Bonaccio and Dalal 2006). Given that advice seeking can provide many of the same benefits as delegation—additional information, validation of one’s inclinations, and lessened responsibility for choice outcomes—factors that influence choice delegation, such as choice difficulty and perceived responsibility, are also likely to influence advice seeking. Indeed, in many cases, advice seeking may provide an attractive alternative to delegation in that it provides many of the same benefits while still allowing people to maintain control over the final decision. However, when choice difficulty is high and concerns about being responsible for potentially making the wrong choice are exacerbated, people may prefer delegation to advice so that they may more fully cede responsibility for the final decision to another person. To test this prediction, we asked 142 undergraduates at a large southeastern university to imagine that they were selecting an entrée off a restaurant menu. Choice difficulty was manipulated by presenting
participants with a menu that featured either a few items (easy condition) or many items (difficult condition; Iyengar and Lepper 2000). Delegation was operationalized by having participants choose the three menu items they found most appealing and having the waiter choose one of those three entrées for them. Advice seeking was its mirror image: participants could have the waiter suggest the three entrées he liked the best, and participants would choose which of those three items they wished to order. Participants were more likely to delegate choices rather than seek advice in the large array condition (64%) than in the small array condition, (47%; χ²(1, N = 142) = 4.03, p < .05, ϕ = .34, suggesting that as choice difficulty increases, people may prefer to pass responsibility for making a final decision to another person. In future research, it would be interesting to explore other circumstances in which people distinguish between delegation and advice; for example, research could test whether increasing perceived responsibility might also increase preference for delegation over advice.

Another interesting direction for future research would be to examine the role that expertise plays in delegation. Although the present research shows that surrogate expertise is not a necessary prerequisite for choice delegation, expertise might be an important moderator of delegation. Delegation may vary based on the level of expertise possessed by the consumer or potential surrogate and based on the type of expertise possessed by the potential surrogate. There are at least two types of expertise that could be relevant for surrogate decision makers: knowledge of the product can help a surrogate select the best possible item, and knowledge of the consumer can help a surrogate select an option most in line with the consumer’s preferences. Because consumers always have more information about their own tastes than do other people, delegation may depend more on the potential surrogate’s knowledge of the product than their knowledge of the consumer. To explore this idea, we presented 68 undergraduates at a large southeastern
university with a choice between heartburn medications and gave some the option of delegating the decision to a pharmacist and others the option of delegating the decision to a roommate. The pharmacist was described as knowing a lot about heartburn and how heartburn medications work but knowing little about the participant’s personality or lifestyle, and the roommate was described in the opposite manner. Participants who were given the option of delegating to a pharmacist were more likely to delegate the choice of heartburn medication (68%) than participants who were given the option of delegating to a roommate (9%; \( \chi^2(1, N = 68) = 24.91, p < .001, \phi = 3.02 \)). Thus, at least in this context, consumers seemed to place more weight on the potential surrogate’s product knowledge than personal knowledge. However, the weight that consumers place on these different sources of expertise may also depend on the match between the type of expertise possessed by the surrogate and the type most relevant to the decision. For example, product knowledge may be valued more when the right choice is a matter of quality, such as when alternatives are vertically differentiated, and personal knowledge may be valued more when the right choice is a matter of taste, such as when alternatives are horizontally differentiated.

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. 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. Additionally, depending on who the primary decision makers are, marketers may
allocate resources differently across different elements of the marketing mix. A pharmaceutical company might wish to 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.

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. 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 factors that influence delegation to surrogate decision makers are not well understood. The present research contributes to the study of surrogate usage in marketing by identifying conditions under which consumers are most likely employ others to make decisions on their behalf. This work further complements research on preference for choice by showing that, although people prefer decision autonomy when reflecting back on choices in which they had no say in whether they or another party made the final decision, they often prefer to delegate choices to others when considering difficult choices in prospect. 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 people may often utilize other people in their social environments to help them make decisions. After all, as our findings attest, decision making does not merely take place in a person’s head, but rather, in a dynamic social context.
APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ABOUT PHARMACEUTICALS IN SIMPLE OR DENSE FORMAT, STUDY 2A

SIMPLE FORMAT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Brands</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Relief Duration</th>
<th>Potential Side Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antacids</td>
<td>Tums, Rolaid</td>
<td>Take when you experience heartburn</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>Constipation, Kidney stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid reducers</td>
<td>Pepcid AC, Zantac 75</td>
<td>Take an hour before eating heartburn-causing foods</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proton-pump inhibitors</td>
<td>Prilosec</td>
<td>Take every day, at the same time, for two weeks</td>
<td>Up to 4 months</td>
<td>Upper respiratory infections (e.g., common cold &amp; stomach pain)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DENSE FORMAT:

There are several things you should consider when choosing an antacid. First, consider when you should take them. Antacids like Tums and Rolaid should be taken when you experience heartburn. Drugs like Pepcid AC and Zantac 75 are acid reducers and need to be taken about an hour before you eat heartburn-causing foods. In comparison, proton-pump inhibitors like Prilosec are taken once a day, every day at the same time, for two weeks. Next, consider duration of relief. Antacids will relieve your heartburn for one to two hours, and acid reducers will relieve your heartburn for six to ten hours. Proton-pump inhibitors can prevent heartburn for up to four months. Finally, consider potential side effects. Antacids can cause constipation and kidney stones as side effects of their regular use, while acid reducers can cause headaches, and Prilosec’s side effects can include upper respiratory infections, like the common cold, and stomach pain.
### APPENDIX B

**MENU OPTIONS IN FLUENT OR DISFLUENT FONT, STUDIES 2B AND 5**

#### FLUENT FONT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrées</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand Cut Tagliatelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griggstown Chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea Salt Crusted Salmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penne a la Telefono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggplant Parmigiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latini Penne Bolognese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simply Grazin’ Double cut Pork Chop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Spring Market Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veal Osso Bucco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Shrimp Risotto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic Paella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef Strip Steak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### DISFLUENT FONT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrées</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand Cut Tagliatelle</td>
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<td>Classic Paella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef Strip Steak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


FIGURE 1

PREFERENCE FOR HAVING THE EXPERIMENTER CHOOSE AS A FUNCTION OF NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVES AND CONDITION (OPTIONAL CHOICE, SELF CHOICE, AND EXPERIMENTER CHOICE), STUDY 1
FIGURE 2

CHOICE DELEGATION AS A FUNCTION OF THE SURROGATE’S STATUS AND WHO WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHOICE OUTCOME, STUDY 4
FIGURE 3

CHOICE DELEGATION AS A FUNCTION OF CHOICE FLUENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR OWN OR OTHERS' OUTCOMES, STUDY 5

![Bar chart showing choice delegation as a function of choice fluency and responsibility for own or others' outcomes, Study 5.](image-url)