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Consumer decisions in relationships

Jeffry A. Simpson *, Vladas Griskevicius, Alexander J. Rothman

University of Minnesota, USA

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Abstract

Most research on consumer choice assumes that decisions are usually made by individuals, and that these decisions are based on an individual's personal attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. Yet, much consumer behavior—from joint decisions to individual choices—is directly or indirectly shaped by people with whom we have some relationship. In this target article, we examine how each member in a relationship can affect how consumer decisions are made. After reviewing foundational work in the area, we introduce a powerful and statistically sophisticated methodology to study decisions within relationships—a dyadic framework of decision-making. We then discuss how the study of consumer decisions in relationships can be informed by different theories in the relationships field, including attachment, interdependence, social power, communal/exchange orientations, relationship norms, and evolutionary principles. By building on the seminal foundations of prior joint-decision making research with theories and methods from contemporary relationship science, we hope to facilitate the integration of the consumer and relationships literature to better understand and generate novel hypotheses about consumer decisions in relationships.

Keywords: Consumer decision-making; Relationships; Dyadic framework; Attitudes

Introduction

Consider the following decisions:

- You and your romantic partner are looking to buy a home. You would like a modern place, but your partner really wants something more traditional. After considering your partner's preference, you override your own preference and decide to buy a more traditional home.
- You and a friend are going to the movies. You really want to see an adventure film, but your friend wouldn't mind a romantic comedy. Despite having a much stronger preference for the adventure film, you recall that you chose the film the last time the two of you went out. Thus, you agree to see the romantic comedy.
- You're getting lunch for yourself. Although you are in the mood for pizza, you recall that your significant other wants you to eat healthier. Even though you're eating by yourself, you order a salad.

As these three examples indicate, many of the consumer decisions that individuals make are directly or indirectly shaped by important other people with whom we have a relationship. Some of these behaviors involve joint decisions, such as when a couple decides which house, car, or insurance plan to purchase, how to remodel or repair their home, where to go on vacation, which movie or television program to watch, or where to go out for dinner. Other decisions, although made individually, can still be affected by another person indirectly. For example, consider a person in a close relationship who is out shopping alone for clothes. Although this person will choose what to buy, the decision may be influenced by the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of his or her relationship partner.

The vast majority of consumer decision-making research is grounded on two important assumptions. First, most choices reflect decisions made by individuals. Second, these decisions are primarily a function of the individual's own personal attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. When considering decision-making in the context of close relationships, however, one must go beyond the individual to understand how decisions are made. Although some models of behavior include perceptions

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0344, USA.
E-mail address: simps108@umn.edu (J.A. Simpson).

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of factors outside the individual (e.g., Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005), decision-making models provide limited guidance as to how, when, or why other individuals in a relationship with the decision-maker directly or indirectly affect decision-making.

Because consumer decisions are often made in the context of established relationships, researchers, practitioners, and consumers can benefit from a richer understanding of how relationship partners can influence a person's choices. By attending to the relationship context in which decisions are made, researchers can formulate more precise models that specify not only when and why a person's own preferences might *not* predict his or her choices, but also how these preferences are shaped by other significant individuals. These models can, in turn, help marketers, consumers, and researchers identify and assess factors that typically have been viewed as outside the decision-making process. Such knowledge could help marketers develop more targeted and precise promotion strategies that are responsive to the relationships in which people are involved.

In this target article, we examine consumer decisions in relationships. Our core contributions include introducing an emerging methodology for studying consumer decisions within relationships (a dyadic framework), and presenting some key theories and findings from relationship science that might inform the study of consumer behavior. To accomplish these goals, the article is divided into three major sections. In the first section, we representatively review the relatively small amount of prior research on consumer decisions in relationship contexts. In section two, we draw on recent methodological and statistical advances in the modeling of dyadic data and present a dyadic framework for studying consumer decision-making within relationships. Using this methodology, in the third section we discuss how theory and empirical findings in the field of relationships can inform the study of consumer behavior. Throughout the paper, we highlight how a dyadic framework and methodology, in combination with theory and research findings from relationship science, can be used to build on the foundation of prior research on consumer decision-making in relationships by generating novel ideas and hypotheses.

Past research on consumer decisions in relationships

Although the majority of decision-making research has investigated how individuals make choices based on their own personal beliefs, attitudes, and preferences, some isolated research has considered how decisions operate in the context of relationships. Because prior work on consumer decisions in relationships has focused on decisions rather than on relationships per se, the vast majority of past research has not incorporated theories that are central to the study of relationships or methods that are core to the study of dyadic interactions. Instead, most of the classic work in this small area has examined joint-purchasing decisions. We briefly review some of this foundational research.

Early explorations of joint-decision making considered how married couples make major household decisions (Davis, 1970, 1971, 1976), including how spouses purchase a home (Hempel, 1974, 1975; Munsinger, Weber, & Hansen, 1975), purchase cars or expensive home furnishings (Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976; Woodside, 1975), and make other major financial decisions (Ferber & Lee, 1974; Menasco & Curry, 1989; Qualls, 1987). This work clarified the processes underlying joint decision-making (e.g., Burns, 1977; Burns & Granbois, 1977; Munsinger et al., 1975). For example, rather than evaluating market opportunities and constraints to arrive at an optimal choice, couples tend to use conflict-avoidance tactics and often "muddle through" home-purchasing decisions (Park, 1982). In other words, instead of "making" a decision, most couples eventually "reach" a consensus through a series of unstructured smaller decisions that lead them toward a major purchase.

There also have been a handful of attempts to explore how family structure and gender influence joint decision-making. For example, Filiatrault and Ritchie (1980) observed that husbands tend to dominate decision-making in couples that do not have children. Kirchler (1993) found that women use "weaker" tactics (e.g., acting helpless, offering trade-offs) than men do, and happy couples use more constructive tactics (e.g., integrative solutions), whereas unhappy couples use more destructive tactics (e.g., punishment, aggression).

Focusing on the process of influence, Corfman and Lehman (1987) developed a model of cooperative group influence and decision-making. According to this model, before deciding whether and how to influence a group decision, individuals estimate the likely effectiveness of making a specific influence attempt and how costly or beneficial this use of power is likely to be. The model was tested by estimating how much influence wives and husbands exerted based on their individual preferences in joint-decisions involving 12 products. The relative preference of each product (i.e., how much one spouse wanted a particular product relative to the other spouse) predicted how much influence each partner exerted on his or her spouse to obtain the product. In addition, the decisions that couples made were responsive to what had previously happened (i.e., which partner got the product they wanted on prior decision trials). Many couples followed a turn-taking rule, whereby the individual who made the last product choice allowed his or her partner to make the next product choice.[1]

A very small number of studies have used observational methods to assess influence attempts enacted by different family members or friends during purchasing decisions. Lee and Beatty (2008) videotaped families during simulated decision-making tasks and found that mothers who contributed more financially to their families had more decision-making influence than mothers who did not work outside the home. Oriña, Wood, and Simpson (2002) investigated how romantic partners spontaneously influenced each other during videotaped conflict discussions. Individuals who felt closer to their dating partners were more likely to reference the relationship during their influence attempts by using words such as "we", "us", and "our" more frequently. While spontaneous influence tactics

[1] Social network techniques have also been proposed (e.g., Iacobucci & Hopkins, 1992), but most of these models focus on larger constellations of group members (e.g., sales teams, buyer teams) rather than families or dyads.

based on logical reasoning or coercion were ineffective, tactics that referenced the relationship proved to be an effective way to influence the relationship partner. Recent research (e.g., Bagozzi, Wong, & Bergami, 2000; Luo, 2005; Torelli, 2006) has continued to investigate various aspects of decision-making in relationships periodically.

Focusing on the relationship in decisions within relationships

Prior research on decision-making in dyads has documented several important outcomes and has highlighted the importance of considering the preferences of *both* relationship partners in decision-making contexts. Because past research on decisions in relationships has tended to focus on the decision component rather than on the relationship component, prior research has rarely considered how major theories or models that are central to relationships might relate to joint decision-making. As we discuss later in this article, several major theories and models in the field of relationships could inform, clarify, and extend our understanding of when and how relationship partners influence each other's choices.

In addition, prior research on consumer decisions made within dyads has not taken full advantage of recent methodological and statistical advances in the modeling of dyadic data. With the advent of new statistical techniques, such as the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM: Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), researchers can now model more precisely the unique amount of impact that each individual (i.e., actor) in a given relationship has on his or her partner, and vice versa. Using these new techniques, researchers can estimate both how much influence and what type of influence both relationship partners have on each other without violating assumptions of statistical independence (i.e., that all respondents have uncorrelated error terms). As a result, researchers can now formulate and test a new generation of research questions, such as "In what kinds of situations do individuals who have certain personality traits, attributes, or motivations exert more versus less influence on what their partners decide to purchase?"

Building upon earlier consumer research in relationships, we now discuss dyadic modeling techniques and suggest how a dyadic framework can improve the prediction of when, why, and how people make certain consumer choices in the context of relationships.

A dyadic approach to decision-making

Although there are exceptions (see above), the vast majority of consumer decision research has focused on how the variables of a single individual impact his or her decisions. To illustrate a general individual/actor decision-making process, consider the following example. Two individuals (Person 1 and Person 2) are each trying to decide where to go out for dinner, choosing between Option A and Option B. Each individual has specific attitudes and beliefs about each option. To form a preference for one restaurant over the other, each person compares the features of Option A to those of Option B, which results in a relative evaluation of the two options. The preference reflects both how much an individual prefers a given option (i.e., attitude valence) and how strongly s/he feels about that option (i.e., attitude strength, importance, or certainty; Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent, & Carnot, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). As illustrated in Fig. 1, the choice is the enactment of an individual's specific preference, with individuals usually choosing the more preferred restaurant.

Because the two individuals depicted in Fig. 1 are independent of each other, they have no influence on each other's beliefs, attitudes, preferences, or choices. For this reason, all of the paths in Fig. 1 exist entirely *within* each person (i.e., within Person 1 and within Person 2) and, therefore, the potential influences of another person are not considered. If Persons 1 and 2 do not know each other or live separately, this assumption is appropriate. However, consumer decisions often involve the interests of other people, such as a romantic partner, friend, co-worker, or family member. In these cases, knowing only one person's beliefs, attitudes, and preferences may be insufficient to accurately predict the choice that is ultimately made. Indeed, in some situations, an individual's decision may not reflect his or her own personal interests at all, but those of his/her current partner.

To improve our understanding of how consumer decisions are made in relationships, we must directly consider the interdependence—the interconnection—of relationship partners' attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. In recent years, the study of relationships has benefitted tremendously from using dyadic models to identify how relationship partners influence one another as they make important decisions, both individually and together. Dyadic models have allowed researchers to ask and answer many novel questions, such as when do individuals act on their *own* attitudes and intentions when deciding whether or not to engage in safe-sex, and when are they responsive to their romantic *partner's* attitudes and intentions (see Karney et al., 2010). Recent research on romantic relationships using dyadic models has also identified the conditions under which romantic partners influence how individuals resolve conflicts (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005), regulate their emotions (e.g., Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006), are persuaded by specific influence tactics (e.g., Oriña et al., 2008; Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009), and concede to their partners (e.g., Tran & Simpson, 2009). By using dyadic models, this research has been able to target and test the degree to which an individual in a relationship is influenced by his or her partner, statistically controlling for the individual's

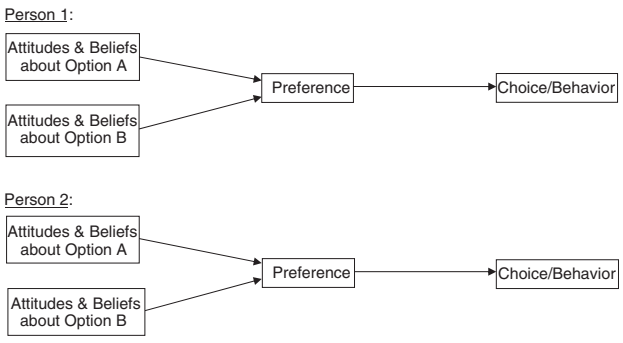

Fig. 1. Individual-actor model of behavior for two independent people.

own traits, attitudes, and personal preferences. Because dyadic models have drastically altered and expanded the questions that can be asked and answered about how relationship partners influence each other, we now present a dyadic framework of consumer decision-making in relationships.

A dyadic framework of decision-making

Consider once again the example of two people choosing a restaurant. However, rather than two independent actors making their own personal decisions, imagine that the two people are in a romantic relationship and must choose one restaurant. In this situation, each person's attitudes, beliefs, and preferences—as well as the strength of those attitudes, beliefs, and preferences—ought to influence which restaurant is selected.

Fig. 2 presents a general dyadic framework of decision-making in relationships. The primary purpose of this framework is to highlight the many new and interesting research questions that emerge when one adopts a dyadic perspective to consumer decision-making. In addition to including each person's individual attitudes, beliefs, and preferences that may affect the decision, this framework adds partner-specific sources of influence on the decision. This framework, which is based on a statistical technique known as the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006), explicitly considers the simultaneous influences of both individual actor effects and partner effects on decision-making. Individual *actor effects* assess the extent to which an individual's choices are influenced by his or her own beliefs, attitudes, and preferences about a particular option, statistically controlling for his/her partner's beliefs, attitudes, and preferences. Individual actor effects are represented in Fig. 2 by the solid lines. *Partner effects*, on the other hand, assess the extent to which an individual's choices are influenced by the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of his or her *partner*, statistically controlling for the individual's own attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. Partner effects are represented in Fig. 2 by the dashed lines.

Let's now consider the dyadic example in more detail. Suppose that a couple named John (Person 1) and Mary (Person 2) are choosing between two restaurants—Chinese and Italian.

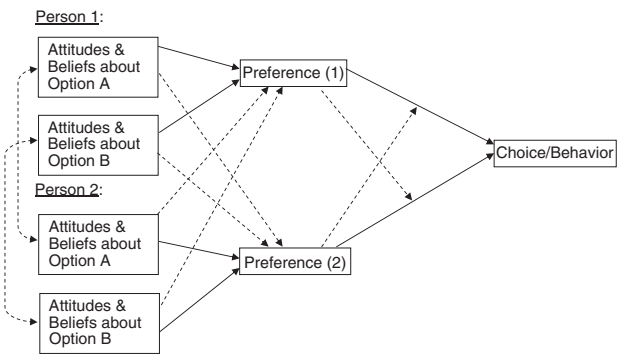

Fig. 2. A dyadic framework of consumer decision-making. Solid lines are paths from the individual-actor model. Dashed lines are paths representing dyadic (relationship) effects.

Because they often go out to eat, Mary has a good idea of what John thinks about each restaurant, and John has a good idea of what Mary thinks about each restaurant. Both partners, therefore, can infer with reasonable accuracy what each other's restaurant attitudes, beliefs, and preferences are likely to be. To the extent that Mary and John care about each other's desires, they should be influenced by (i.e., responsive to) each other's attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. However, there are multiple ways in which one person can influence another person's decision-making. The dyadic framework in Fig. 2 depicts three types of partner influence.

The first type of partner influence reflects the extent to which each person's attitudes and beliefs affect the other person's preference. For example, although John might feel more positively toward the Chinese restaurant, he knows that Mary loves the particular Italian restaurant they are considering, so his preference about where to go may be largely or entirely determined by Mary's attitudes and beliefs. In statistical terms, the strength (i.e., the size of the Beta weight) of the dashed path from Mary's attitudes and beliefs to John's preference should be larger than the strength of the path from John's own attitudes and beliefs to his preference.

The second type of partner influence involves how a partner's preference affects the relation between an individual's own preference and what he or she eventually decides to do. John, for example, might prefer the Chinese restaurant, but his preference is weak compared to Mary's strong preference for the Italian restaurant. As a result, Mary's strong preference may attenuate (i.e., moderate) the effect of John's preference on his final decision. This source of partner influence is reflected in Fig. 2 by the dashed lines going from one person's preference to the solid line between the other person's preference and ultimate choice.

The third type of partner influence captures the extent to which each person changes the other person's attitudes and beliefs over time. For instance, Mary's affection for the Italian restaurant may gradually lead John to conclude that there is much more to like about the Italian restaurant. This source of partner influence is depicted by the double-arrowed curved paths on the left side of Fig. 2. Over time, this process should make Mary's and John's attitudes and beliefs about each restaurant more similar. As partners come to synchronize their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences across time, it may appear as if they are making decisions based on their own personal characteristics, but these revised partner-influenced attitudes and beliefs now reflect the norm that each couple has developed about a specific type of decision (i.e., "We typically prefer and choose the Italian restaurant over the Chinese one."). When partners have synchronized their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences, the two types of partner effects described earlier are less likely to operate.

Using dyadic models to understand individual choices and partner perceptions

The general dyadic framework in Fig. 2 depicts both individual actor effects (solid lines) and partner effects (dashed lines), representing the statistically unique and independent

effect(s) that relationship partners can exert on one another enroute to making consumer decisions. It is important to emphasize that dyadic models *do not require* the existence of partner effects. If, for example, there is no evidence of a partner effect (i.e., if the Beta weights for the partner paths are not different from 0), one can still estimate and determine whether the actor paths significantly predict the hypothesized outcomes. Dyadic models simply provide a conceptual and statistical framework for hypothesizing, measuring, and testing potential partner effects, above and beyond any individual (actor) effects.

A particularly useful feature of dyadic models is that they can be used to analyze not only joint-decisions (as illustrated in our figures), but also decisions that relationship partners make separately. Consider, for example, a person who is deciding which of two different types of clothing attire to purchase, such as more casual versus less casual attire. Although the choice is made by only one person, the final purchasing decision might be influenced by the presumed attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of one's relationship partner. Returning to our example of John and Mary in Fig. 2, John may prefer to wear more casual clothes, but Mary's strong opinions about "looking snazzier" may outweigh his preference and determine his ultimate choice. Moreover, the effect of Mary's opinion may manifest itself even when she is not shopping with John as he reflects on and responds to—either implicitly or explicitly—what he perceives Mary's attitudes, beliefs, and preferences are.

When individuals make decisions by themselves, they may often make them based more on what they *perceive* their partner thinks rather than on what their partner actually thinks. Though not shown in Fig. 2 for simplicity reasons, each box in the framework is associated with an additional box for *partner perceptions* of each construct. These partner perceptions reflect inferences about what the other person presumably believes, what she or he would prefer to do, and how much s/he is likely to be satisfied with the final outcome. Most individuals in relationships should have fairly accurate perceptions of their partner's attitudes, beliefs, and preferences with regard to specific choices, but their perceptions may not always be accurate (Lerouge & Warlop, 2006). Mary, for example, may be so strongly motivated to go to the Italian restaurant that she "over-infers" John's actual liking for it. If there is slippage between what an individual actually prefers (e.g., to go to the Italian restaurant) and what his or her partner thinks he or she prefers (e.g., to go to the Chinese restaurant), this may generate discussion, negotiation, and perhaps conflict in the relationship. If, for instance, John mistakenly infers that Mary wants to go to the Chinese restaurant when she really prefers the Italian restaurant, his actions are likely to instigate a discussion and may produce friction in the relationship.

One barrier to adopting dyadic approaches in the past has been the difficulty of gathering data from both relationship partners. Such information, however, is much easier to gather today through the use of online methodologies. Furthermore, some of this information might not need to be gathered from individuals themselves, but can be ascertained from their purchase histories or social media websites such as Facebook. And in many instances, collecting information from relationship partners may not be necessary since the key component of how relationship partners influence decisions is through the *perceptions* of what an individual believes his or her partner thinks about a particular decision.

In sum, dyadic models provide a precise and statistically appropriate method to model and estimate the impact that each person within a relationship has when making consumer decisions. In the next section, we build on this methodological foundation and discuss how major theoretical insights from the study of relationships can inform the study of consumer behavior and decision-making within a relationship context.

The nature of romantic relationships

The study of relationships is a large area with a long and rich history in psychology. Although consumer research has rarely crossed paths with relationship science, the fusion of these two major areas has the potential to substantially advance our understanding consumer behavior in relationship contexts. Indeed, as we discuss below, knowledge of relationships may at times be *essential* to addressing which individual within a relationship is more likely to influence and/or be influenced by his or her partner, along with how, why, and when this influence tends to occur.

Decision-making in relationships can be informed by several major theories in relationship science, including Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), theories of power (French & Raven, 1959; Oriña, Simpson, Farrell, & Rothman, in press), the Communal/Exchange Model (Clark & Mills, 1979), social norm models (McCall, 1970; Venkataramani-Johar, 2005), and evolutionary theories (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). We now discuss key principles from each of these theoretical perspectives, providing a brief introduction of how each one might apply to consumer decision-making in relationships.

Attachment orientations

According to Bowlby (1969), humans are innately motivated to bond with significant others, such as parents, close friends, and romantic partners. Based on how they have been treated by significant others during their lives, individuals develop different kinds of psychological orientations toward their adult partners and relationships. These individual differences, known as attachment orientations, have important implications for how people think, feel, and behave in their adult relationships (see Simpson & Rholes, 2012).

Adult attachment orientations exist on two dimensions: *anxiety* and *avoidance*. Each orientation can be measured with short, well-validated self-report scales such as the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ: Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Anxiously attached individuals want greater emotional closeness and more felt security with their romantic partners. To achieve this, they try to accommodate and please their partners whenever possible, but worry that their partners do not really love

them and might leave them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In contrast, avoidantly attached individuals yearn to be self-reliant and independent. To achieve this, they establish and maintain comfortable psychological and emotional distance from their romantic partners and, consequently, view relationships as a less central part of their lives and social identities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Anxious and avoidant individuals are likely to behave very differently when making decisions with their romantic partners. Anxious individuals, for instance, may be more susceptible to the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of their partners, especially when they are involved in close and highly committed relationships (Tran & Simpson, 2009). Avoidant individuals, in contrast, may be less susceptible to partner influence (cf. Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001).

Returning to our example (see Fig. 2), if John is anxiously attached, he should be more susceptible to Mary's preferences about where to dine, particularly if he is strongly committed to Mary and their relationship. If, however, Mary is avoidantly attached, she may be less affected by John's preferences unless she depends on him for unique outcomes in their relationship. In relationships that contain an anxious and an avoidant partner, stable influence asymmetries may develop (cf. Shallcross, Howland, Bemis, Simpson, & Frazier, 2011), with anxious people being most vulnerable to partner influence when their relationship is very close and committed, and with avoidant people being especially resistant to partner influence.

In sum, consumer decision-making in relationships may depend on each person's attachment orientation. Although anxiously attached people should generally be motivated to accommodate their partner's preferences, they should be particularly inclined to do so when their relationships are very close and committed. And although avoidantly attached people should typically be motivated to resist being influenced by their partners preferences, they should be more likely to acquiesce when they rely on their partners for unique or good outcomes. Future consumer research should investigate how attachment orientations systematically affect various aspects of decision-making in relationships.

Relationship dependence and alternatives

Another seminal theory in the field of relationships is Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). According to Interdependence Theory, people become dependent on their partners when partners provide them with unique benefits that other people cannot or do not provide. The degree to which individuals perceive they are dependent on their partners for good outcomes can be assessed by validated self-report scales such as the Dependency Scale (Berscheid & Fei, 1977). For example, if Mary provides John with many benefits that he cannot get elsewhere (e.g., large amounts of love, companionship, status, or money), John is likely to become highly dependent on Mary. This, in turn, should make him more responsive to her desires when they make decisions (cf. Kleppe & Gronhaug, 2003). Relationship partners can also both be highly dependent on each other. If, for example, John and Mary both provide each other with unique benefits (e.g., love, companionship) that no other potential partner can match, both John and Mary should feel highly dependent and, therefore, they should both exert strong influence on one another's preferences and decisions.

Relationship dependence should have the strongest effects on consumer decision-making when individuals feel structurally "tied down" to their partners due to poor alternatives, a lack of resources, or the inability to leave the relationship. For instance, if Mary is highly dependent on John and she also feels structurally bound to staying with him, she should accommodate most of his preferences, especially those he deems important. With the passage of time, Mary may even revise her own attitudes, beliefs, and preferences so they align more closely with John's, reducing friction and conflict in their relationship.

Interdependence Theory offers two additional insights into how individuals evaluate their relationships, both of which have important implications for consumer decision-making. First, individuals evaluate the degree to which they are getting what they believe they "deserve" in their relationship, which reflects their *comparison level* (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When individuals think they are getting what they deserve (or better than they deserve), they tend to be more satisfied with their relationship. But when individuals believe they are getting less than they deserve, they are much less satisfied (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Second, individuals also evaluate the quality of their current alternative partner and relationship options, known as the *comparison level for alternatives* (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When individuals believe they do not have better options elsewhere, they tend to have more stable relationships. However, when they think they could get better outcomes with another partner or in another relationship, their relationships become unstable (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Both the comparison level and the comparison level for alternatives can be measured with short, well-validated self-report scales (Simpson, 1987).

Returning to our example, if Mary starts receiving more attention from other attractive men, she may eventually expect to receive more and better benefits from John, especially if he wants her to stay with him. Similarly, if Mary senses that there is a favorable ratio of men-to-women in the local area (i.e., there are many attractive, available men; Griskevicius et al., 2012; Durante, Griskevicius, Cantu, Simpson, & Tybur, in press), she is likely to increase her standards of the outcomes she thinks she deserves in her relationship with John. If this occurs, Mary should exert greater influence on both John's individual decisions and on the joint-decisions they make together, and John should be more likely to acquiesce.

In sum, how dependent an individual is on his or her partner should affect how susceptible he or she is to the influence of his/her partner. In general, more dependent individuals ought to be more strongly affected by what their partners think, believe, and prefer, whereas the opposite should be true of less dependent individuals. These effects, however, may be moderated by how structurally tied each partner is to the relationship. Future research needs to examine how dependence and the perception of alternatives affect different aspects of consumer decision-making in relationships.

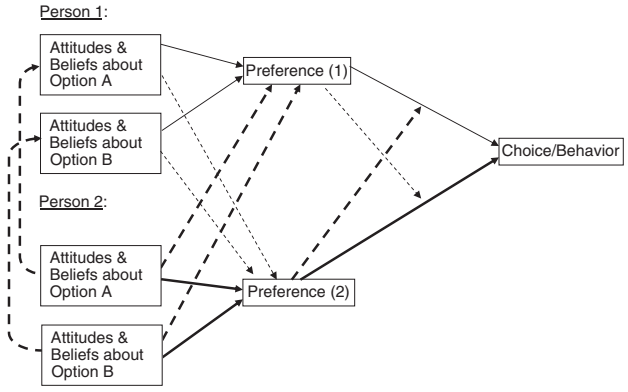

Fig. 3. An elaborated dyadic framework of consumer decision-making showing power disparity. Solid lines are paths from the individual-actor model. Dashed lines are paths showing dyadic (relationship) effects. Thicker lines indicate stronger influence (e.g., greater influence by Person 2, indicated by larger Beta weights).

Social power

Another central concept in relationships is social power (French & Raven, 1959; Oriña et al., in press). When long-term, stable asymmetries in the level of dependence emerge between relationship partners, chronic differences in power typically develop (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When one relationship partner has greater control over the ultimate fate of the other, the more powerful person should adopt an agentic orientation and exert greater influence, particularly on important decisions made within the relationship (Kirchler, 1995; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, in press). For example, if Mary has more power than John within their relationship, the strength of the partner paths leading from Mary to John should be greater than the corresponding partner paths leading from John to Mary. This situation is depicted in Fig. 3 by the darker lines running from the more powerful person (Person 2, Mary) to the less powerful person (Person 1, John). The more powerful person also has greater capacity to change the attitudes and beliefs of the less powerful person across time as the couple discusses various consumer options. This is indicated in Fig. 3 by the *unidirectional* arrows running from the more powerful person's attitudes and beliefs about each option to the less powerful person's corresponding attitudes and beliefs. Chronic power differences between two partners can be measured by the Relational Power Scale (Farrell, Simpson, & Rothman, 2012).[2]

Social power stems from one or more of six sources: coercion (controlling others by threatening to punish them), reward (control by promising rewards), legitimacy (control by the higher authority, role, or position one holds), expertise (control by having superior knowledge or information), credibility (control by the truthfulness and accuracy of information one has), and referent (control by expressing personal acceptance or social approval to others) (French & Raven, 1959). The nature of the influence exerted by the more powerful person may differ in specific ways depending on the source (or sources) of that power, though future research still needs to determine this.

Partner differences in social power should have the strongest effects on consumer decision-making in relationships when the choice is important to the high-power partner. In these situations, the low-power partner may often capitulate to the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of the high-power partner. However, there may be circumstances in which high-power partners consider and act upon the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of their low-power partners. One circumstance is when low-power partners make intense pleas for getting their way, perhaps by highlighting the importance of "fairness" or accentuating how important the relationship is to the high-power partner (see Oriña et al., 2002). Other circumstances may include situations in which high-power partners feel especially close to their low-power partners, are anxiously attached, or need their low-power partners for the special resources or outcomes they can provide. Such circumstances, however, may be relatively rare and infrequent.

The low-power partner in a relationship may also pay closer attention to the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of his or her high-power partner given the low-power partner's greater outcome dependence (Dépret & Fiske, 1993). If so, the low-power partner may have more accurate perceptions of the high-power partner's beliefs, attitudes, and preferences regarding certain choices, permitting the low-power partner to act in line with the desires of the high-power partner, which should make their interactions unfold more smoothly. The high-power partner, on the other hand, is likely to hold less accurate perceptions of the low-power partner's specific attitudes, beliefs, and preferences, which may lead high-power partners to believe they are being responsive when, in fact, they are not.

In sum, consumer decision-making should depend on which of the two partners in a relationship has relatively greater power, with the low-power person typically going along with the high-power partner's desires, particularly when the decision is important to the high-power partner. Future research needs to clarify how power differences stemming from different sources of power within relationships uniquely affect consumer decision-making outcomes.

Communal and exchange relationships

Relationships differ in the rules that partners use when giving and receiving benefits. Clark and Mills (1979) identified two basic types of relationships: those that are communal versus exchange in nature. In *communal* relationships, which include those between parents and child, most close family members, and many long-term relationships between close friends or romantic partners, partners do not keep track of the benefits they give to and receive from each other, at least over short time-periods. Instead, each partner offers benefits in response to the immediate needs of his or her partner, following communal sharing principles (Fiske, 1992). In *exchange* relationships, which

[2] In many relationships, power may be domain-specific in that one partner has greater influence in certain domains, whereas the other partner has more in other domains (Oriña et al., in press; Webster, 1998). Thus, power differences within a relationship should be measured with respect to specific decisions.

include those between strangers, business partners, new friends, or new romantic partners, each partner keeps tabs of the benefits he or she has given and received and attempts to repay his/her partner in kind as soon as possible. In exchange relationships, therefore, each partner exchanges specific goods or services in a quid-pro-quo fashion following market-pricing principles (Fiske, 1992). Each relationship type can be assessed using validated lab procedures (see Clark & Mills, 1979), and individual differences in the strength of each relationship orientation can be measured by validated self-report scales (e.g., Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004).

Couples that have communal relationships should be more strongly affected by the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of their partners, primarily because these individuals are motivated to monitor and meet their partner's desires and needs when possible. Returning to our example, if Mary and John have a communal relationship, each of them should be strongly affected by the other's desires about which restaurant to choose, sometimes placing their own personal preference on the back burner. Couples that have exchange relationships, in contrast, should be less responsive to each other's desires unless rules based on prior agreements specify when each person should be more responsive to his or her partner's preferences than his/her own. If Mary and John have an exchange relationship, for example, they both should be relatively more responsive to their own attitudes, beliefs, and preferences when making decisions unless agreed upon rules dictate otherwise. Mary may be the partner who usually chooses the restaurants, so John knows he should defer in this situation. Alternatively, their exchange-based relationship may lead Mary and John to take turns with respect to which partner makes the next decision (see the Relationship norms section below).

In sum, knowing the *type* of relationship that partners have should determine both the strength of partner effects as well as when self versus partner preferences take precedence in consumer decision-making. Interestingly, exchange-based relationships may often have more complicated rules about when individuals should act on their own attitudes, beliefs, and preferences and when they should be more responsive to those of their partners. Future research should explore how communal and exchange orientations influence different aspects of consumer decision-making in relationships.

Relationship norms

Another pivotal concept in relationships is norms. Social norms play a major role in several classic theories of attitude–behavior relations (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; Cialdini et al., 1990; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These models address personal norms (e.g., Schwartz & Fleishmann, 1982), the norms of what an individual expects should be done in a particular situation (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), or what an individual believes others typically do in that situation (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1990). Within many relationships, however, unique *relationship norms* may also emerge that shape each partner's expectations of what should happen in that relationship (McCall, 1970; Venkataramani-Johar, 2005).

Relationship norms can exist at multiple levels. Some norms reflect basic heuristics or scripts that govern what both partners typically do in certain situations. For example, relationship partners may develop and adopt general turn-taking norms, whereby the last partner who made a choice automatically defers to his or her partner the next time a similar choice is made (e.g., Corfman & Lehman, 1987). Other relationship norms reflect consensual agreements about how certain decisions should typically be made. Mary and John, for instance, may eventually agree that Mary usually makes the restaurant choices, while John typically decides on the movies. Alternatively, Mary and John may adopt a norm whereby the partner who has the most knowledge or expertise about a given product typically makes the final decision.

Other relationship norms may be more complex and time-dependent. For example, if John has recently done something that hurt Mary or destabilized their relationship, he may defer to her preferences during the next month in order to restore balance, fairness, and equity to their relationship (cf. Su, Zhou, Zhou, & Li, 2008). Once equilibrium has been restored, however, John should revert back to following the usual norms in the relationship.

Knowing which specific relationship norms are used by partners in a relationship should increase our ability to predict and understand what individuals do and do not decide. An understanding of relationship norms is particularly important because such norms may erode links between partners' attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and eventual choices. For example, if turn-taking norms dictate that it is John's turn to decide where to eat, Mary's very strong preference for the Italian restaurant might not have much effect on the final decision. Over time, relationship norms may gradually translate into less conscious habits, which may further attenuate these connections (Ji & Wood, 2007). By understanding each person's attitudes, beliefs, and preferences in combination with the norms in that relationship, researchers can model and predict consumer decision-making in relationships much more accurately.

Evolutionary perspectives

In recent years, many novel insights have been gained by viewing relationships from an evolutionary perspective (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010). An evolutionary perspective draws an important distinction between ultimate and proximate explanations for behavior (Tinbergen, 1963). Psychologists and consumer researchers typically have been concerned with proximate explanations for behavior, which focus on the relatively immediate triggers (causes) of action. For example, when considering why so many people enter and invest in close relationships, the primary *proximate* reasons often include sex, companionship, love, happiness, pleasure, resources, and support. An evolutionary approach, however, also asks *why* people evolved to want sex, companionship, and love, and why these things provide so much intrinsic pleasure. The *ultimate* reason why so many people enter and maintain romantic

relationships is because they enhanced our ancestors' reproductive fitness during evolutionary history.

Proximate and ultimate explanations are not in competition with each other. Rather, they are complementary. Because human behavior is the product of brain activity and the brain is an evolved organ, nearly all behaviors are likely to have both ultimate and proximate explanations. For example, people form and invest in romantic relationships because they provide pleasure (a proximate reason) *and* because they enhance reproductive fitness (an ultimate reason). Both of these explanations are correct. Each one provides insights into the same behaviors, but at different levels of analysis (Simpson & Gangestad, 2001).

From an evolutionary perspective, romantic relationships serve two distinct functions. First, by attracting and mating with opposite-sex partners, our genes are replicated to future generations. The evolutionary motive to attract mates tends to be stronger during the courtship phase of most relationships when partners are dating or in the newlywed phase. During courtship, partners want to show each other their individual uniqueness, positive attributes, and creativity while remaining sensitive to the needs and preferences of their partners (Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006b; Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006a). For example, if Mary and John have just started dating and they have different restaurant preferences, each person might insist that they go to the *other person's* preferred restaurant to convey their openness to new ideas and their sensitivity to and respect for the wishes of the other.

The second evolutionary function of romantic relationships is that they facilitate the rearing of children by enabling two individuals to pool their resources and forge a long-term alliance. Doing so should have improved the survival and long-term reproductive fitness of offspring during evolutionary history. Indeed, field research on hunter–gatherer groups that resemble our ancestors' way of life has shown that children are significantly more likely to survive and thrive when they are raised by two cooperative parents than by one single parent (Hill & Hurtado, 1996). This suggests that the decision-making dynamics in romantic relationships should change when the female partner becomes pregnant. During and after pregnancy, important relationship decisions now must factor in the well-being and long-term interests of the couple's joint genetic future—their new child. Our general dyadic framework is not likely to capture all of the relevant decision-making constructs and processes that transpire when children enter the picture. In fact, in some situations, a couple's consumer decisions might reflect the *opposite* of their individual preferences. For example, although Mary and John might both strongly prefer eating at a nice, quiet Italian restaurant, they may decide to go to a less desirable, loud, but child-friendly restaurant because they know their finicky child will eat some food there.

In sum, an evolutionary perspective suggests that it can be useful for marketers and consumer researchers to know whether a couple does or does not have children, which may have myriad implications for how relationship decisions are made. An evolutionary perspective also helps us understand how consumer decisions in relationships are likely to differ across different *fundamental types* of relationships, such as when decisions are made between pairs of friends, co-workers, or genetic relatives (see Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008). Because different types of relationships are associated with different kinds of evolutionary opportunities and costs, the decision-making process may be somewhat different within each type of relationship.

Conclusion

Most previous research on choice and consumer behavior has assumed that decisions are made by individuals, and that these decisions are largely based on an individual's personal attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. When considering decisions in relationships, however, one must go beyond the individual in order to understand how decisions are made. A considerable amount of consumer behavior—ranging from joint decisions to individual choices—is directly or indirectly shaped by individuals with whom we have a relationship. As we reviewed at the outset of this target article, a relatively small amount of research has examined consumer decisions within established relationships. Although this work provides an important empirical foundation, almost all of it has focused on the decision component rather than on the relationship component of consumer decisions in relationships. Moreover, little if any research has incorporated major theories or pertinent methods from the burgeoning field of relationship science. Our primary goal in this target article was to highlight how future research on consumer decisions in relationships could be advanced by the application of relationship theories and recent methodological improvements.

The first contribution of this article is the introduction of a powerful and statistically sophisticated methodology to study consumer decisions within relationships—a dyadic framework of decision-making. By measuring and modeling the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of *both* individuals within a relationship, one can more accurately predict and understand the processes and outcomes of consumer decision-making in relationships. The dyadic framework presented in this article represents only one possible dyadic model. Many other dyadic models incorporating other constructs are possible, and we encourage researchers to develop and use dyadic models that include their own core constructs of interest. Our objective was to showcase the myriad benefits of adopting a dyadic perspective of consumer decision-making in relationships.

The second contribution of this article is the explication of how decision-making in relationships can be informed by theories and models central to the study of relationships, including attachment orientations, communal versus exchange orientations, interdependence between partners, social power, relationship norms, and evolutionary principles. Each of these theories/models can be used to generate and test novel predictions about consumer decision-making in relationships. For example, as we discussed, individuals who are anxiously attached or have a communal orientation to their relationships may base many of their consumer choices on their *partner's* presumed attitudes, beliefs, and preferences rather than on their own. Conversely, individuals who are less dependent or wield greater power within

their relationship should be less swayed by their partner's desires and preferences. At times, strong relationship norms may override these personality-based and relationship-based attributes, as when partners agree to take turns when making a series of decisions or when they agree to let the partner who has the most knowledge, interest, or expertise choose a product. Certain stable relationship characteristics, such as large and consistent power differences within a relationship, may exert stronger effects on decision-making than other attributes, such as attachment or communal/exchange orientations. The manner in which these relationship theories and models interrelate in predicting consumer decision-making represents another important avenue for future research.

In conclusion, because few individuals are hermits, many important consumer decisions involve more than merely one person thinking, feeling, and behaving in isolation. A great deal can be gained by considering all that we currently know about relationships, by measuring and modeling the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of *both* partners as they make decisions, or by simply measuring the *perceptions* that one partner has of the other. Our hope is that this target article will facilitate the process of integrating the consumer and relationships literature so we can both better understand and generate more novel hypotheses about consumer decisions in the context of relationships.

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