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Studies of consumer decision making often begin with the identification of a dimension on which options differ, followed by an analysis of the factors that influence preferences along that dimension. Building on a conceptual analysis of a diverse set of problems, the authors identify a class of related consumers choices (e.g., extreme vs. compromise, hedonic vs. utilitarian, risky vs. safe) that can all be classified according to their levels of self- versus other-expression (or [un]conventionality). As shown in four studies, these problem types respond similarly to manipulations that trigger or suppress self-expression. Specifically, priming self-expression systematically increases the share of the self-expressive options across choice problems. Conversely, expecting to be evaluated decreases the share of the self-expressive options across the various choice dilemmas. In addition, priming risk seeking increases only the choice of risky gambles but not of other self-expressive options. These findings highlight the importance of seeking underlying shared features across different consumer choice problems, instead of treating each type in isolation.

Keywords: choice, self-expression, other-expression

Multiple Routes to Self- Versus Other-Expression in Consumer Choice

Many consumer decision-making studies begin with the identification of a dimension on which options can be contrasted (e.g., compromise vs. extreme), followed by an analysis of the factors that influence preferences along that dimension (e.g., need for cognition, cognitive load; Drolet, Luce, and Simonson 2009). Each such investigation develops a theory that is tailored to the particular dimension and problem being studied, such as choice between risky versus safe options (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky 1979) or hedonic versus utilitarian options (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Such investigations of consumer decision making are

sometimes focused on individual differences and chronic motivations as explanatory variables. A typical approach involves identifying similarities and dissimilarities among consumers, such as need for cognition (Cacioppo and Petty 1982) and need for uniqueness (NFU; Snyder and Fromkin 1977). These individual differences are then combined with situational cues to examine consumer choice in a given context. For example, the compromise effect (Simonson 1989) is affected by consumers' need for cognition and cognitive load (Drolet, Luce, and Simonson 2009), NFU and providing reasons (Simonson and Nowlis 2000), and cultural orientation (Briley, Morris, and Simonson 2000).

Although this approach of developing a problem-specific theory by studying each problem type and any related individual differences and situational factors separately has provided many important insights, it has the potential to obscure shared aspects of choice dilemmas that have more in common than separate investigations may suggest. That is, by examining multiple choice dimensions and corresponding option types simultaneously, we may be able to identify common factors that underlie some key consumer choices. This is the approach we adopt here. Specifically, we propose that various choice options (e.g., extreme/compromise,

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risky/safe, hedonic/utilitarian) and related choice behaviors can be mapped on a common dimension, defined by how self-expressive (or unconventional) versus other-expressive (or conventional) each option is.

In particular, we propose that the likelihood of choosing self-expressive versus other-expressive options (e.g., choosing an extreme rather than a compromise option) depends on factors that promote or suppress self- versus other-expression. We show that priming self-expression promotes choices of self-expressive options across problem types, whereas suppressing self-expression (by telling consumers their choices will be evaluated by others) has the opposite effect. We further argue that perceptions of options as self- or other-expressive are rather universal and are often influenced more by the nature of the choice problem than by specific individual differences (e.g., one's score on the NFU scale). Indeed, explaining choice behavior using clear option characteristics, rather than using often imprecisely measured individual differences, may offer a more parsimonious and robust explanation for a variety of choice phenomena.

In the next section, we review the literature about choice and self-expression, discuss the different consumer choice problems that involve a decision between self-expressive and other-expressive alternatives, and contrast our framework with other frameworks. We then present four studies that test the proposed distinction between self- and other-expressive options and explore the impact of self- and other-expression primes and conditions on consumer choices across problem types. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

CHOICE OPTIONS AS REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF-VERSUS OTHER-EXPRESSION

Prior research on self-expression has built on the broader literature in social psychology and consumer behavior regarding the tension between conformity and receiving the approval of others on the one hand and asserting one's independence and self-expression on the other hand (e.g., Baumeister 1982; Snyder and Fromkin, 1977; Tian, Bear-den, and Hunter 2001). Specifically, the need to conform and the need to assert one's independence and distinctiveness are considered some of the basic motivations consumers have (e.g., Brewer 1991). To maintain conformity and sense of belongingness, individuals seek ways to be similar to others and to avoid criticism. To differentiate themselves from others, individuals may express unconventional opinions and present unique behaviors. According to uniqueness theory (Snyder and Fromkin 1980), the need to be unique and counterconform varies across situations and personalities. The NFU scale (Snyder and Fromkin 1977) is a measure of individuals' tendency to seek uniqueness and be distinct from others.

We apply the distinction between uniqueness and conformity motivations to the classification of options (and corresponding choices) across a wide range of choice problems consumers encounter in their everyday decision-making processes. We distinguish between options that appear more like the conventional defaults and are thus viewed as other-expressive and options that better express the consumer's individual preferences and are thus perceived as self-expressive. Specifically, other-expressive options serve to satisfy conformity needs, are chosen by majority of respon-

dents, and are less likely to be criticized. When considering these options, consumers focus more on others' preferences and opinions and think of potential criticism. We therefore refer to these options as "other-expressive." Conversely, self-expressive options represent the unconventional, non-default options and are chosen by minority of consumers. When considering these options, consumers are likely to consider their individual tastes and desires; thus, we refer to them as "self-expressive." For example, a popular car model or a typical scenery painting are not expressive of the self's unique aspects, whereas an unusual car or painting is. Similarly, we argue that because a compromise option, a safe option, a useful option, and a low-cost option are typically the conventional, default choices, they are less likely to be self-expressive than the extreme, risky, hedonic, and high-price options, respectively. In the next section, we review the specific problem types for which we apply the self- versus other-expressive distinction.

In addition, we propose that conditions that promote self-/other-expression tend to increase self-/other-expressive choices across problem types. For example, we test whether priming self-expression, rather than priming conventionality and other-expression, increases choice of self-expressive options across the different choice dilemmas. We also test whether manipulations designed to increase accessibility of others' opinion and potential criticism, such as telling consumers their choices will be evaluated, increase choice of the other-expressive options. By identifying conditions that systematically affect choice behavior across a variety of choice problems in different directions (i.e., increase or decrease the share of self-expressive, unconventional options), we are able to develop a unifying framework to study these choice dilemmas.

Classification of Options as Self- Versus Other-Expressive

We focus here on the following previously studied choice dilemmas: (1) choosing between a middle or "compromise" option and two "extreme" options (e.g., Simonson 1989), (2) choosing between enriched ("mixed-value") and impoverished ("all-average") options (e.g., Shafir 1993), (3) choosing between hedonic and utilitarian options (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000), (4) choosing between risky gambles and sure gains (e.g., Weber and Milliman 1997), and (5) choosing between high-price/quality (HP/Q) and low-price/quality (LP/Q) products.

The primary explanations for the compromise effect discussed in the literature relate to the notion of choice based on reasons (e.g., Simonson 1989) and loss (or disadvantage) aversion (e.g., Kivetz, Netzer, and Srinivasan 2004; Simonson and Tversky 1992). Not inconsistent with these accounts, selecting a compromise option is also considered the more conventional selection and is the default for most people (e.g., Briley, Morris, and Simonson 2000; Simonson and Nowlis 2000). Simonson (1989, Study 2) shows that compromise choices are perceived as less likely to be criticized, though they are not easier to justify. Indeed, choosing a compromise may appear "wishy-washy" and perhaps indicate an inability to take a stand. However, the fact that it does not stand out has the virtue of reducing the likelihood of criticism from those who disagree with a particular extreme position and thus represents other-expressive rather than self-expressive choice. Conversely, selecting an extreme

option better allows for the expression of tastes because it can be viewed as a declaration of preference for one attribute over another.

Choices between an “impoverished” (also referred to as “all-average”) option, which has average values on all dimensions, and an “enriched” (or “mixed-value”) option, which has some advantages and some disadvantages, also involve a self-/other-expression dilemma. Simonson and Nowlis (2000) show that concerns about being evaluated and criticized tend to increase the share of the all-average option; thus, selecting this option is akin to choosing a compromise and can be viewed as another form of conventional, other-expressive choice behavior. Conversely, selecting an option that has disadvantages on some attributes and advantages on others (i.e., the mixed-value option) better allows for expression of preference for one attribute over the other, as in the case of choosing the extreme option.

Consider the choice between hedonic and utilitarian options (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Prior research suggests that the utilitarian option is the conventional, default alternative that is easier to justify and less susceptible to criticism. This may lead consumers to underconsume hedonic experiences (e.g., Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Kivetz and Zheng 2006). In contrast, choosing the hedonic option can be viewed as an expression of desires and tastes that may be suppressed when choosing the default, other-expressive, utilitarian option. In particular, hedonic options often represent an expression of a desire to indulge and engage in pleasurable experiences.

Another related dimension is the choice between risky gambles and sure gains, with the sure outcome being significantly lower than the expected value of the gamble. The default option is the sure gain because it requires no explanation and is less likely to be criticized. Thus, it falls in the other-expression category in the sense that it represents the consensus, conventional action. In contrast, a willingness to take risks and be criticized for that can be viewed as more self-expressive, in the sense that this choice behavior better expresses the consumer’s preference for the nondefault behavior.

Finally, though less straightforward, choices between a higher-quality, higher-price option and a lower-quality, lower-price option may also involve a self-other expression dilemma. Recent research suggests that under most conditions, the less expensive option is the default choice (Simonson, Kramer, and Young 2004), whereas opting for the expensive alternative represents a certain degree of independence and self-expression. That is, choosing the higher-price, higher-quality option can be viewed as a declaration of a preference for the quality dimension over the price, despite the inherent uncertainty typically associated with quality.

Option Characteristics Versus Individual Characteristics

As discussed, the self- versus other-expressive distinction between option types is related to the established distinction between uniqueness and conformity motivations (e.g., Snyder and Fromkin 1977). However, the current analysis focuses on common underlying option characteristics rather than on individual differences. In particular, we expect that a given situational cue, such as priming self-expression, will have a systematic effect on choice between self- and other-expressive options across problem types, independently of

individual characteristics, such as NFU (Snyder and Fromkin 1977). This distinction between option characteristics and individual characteristics is important, not merely because of the focal explanatory mechanism but also from a practical perspective. That is, marketers can frame certain options as more self- or other-expressive and, in addition, manipulate self- versus other-expressive primes to shift preferences in favor of certain options. In contrast, marketers typically cannot influence or even measure individual tendencies with respect to uniqueness seeking, for example. We discuss this issue further in the “General Discussion” section.

We believe that to the extent that common option characteristics can account for observed choice behavior, such an approach is more parsimonious and involves less measurement error than most individual difference scales. Furthermore, while prior research has documented some decisions that are moderated by the NFU scale (Snyder 1992; Snyder and Fromkin 1977; see also Simonson and Nowlis 2000), the range of such effects is rather limited. By and large, this scale has not produced many consistent effects on choice. Lynn’s (1991, Table 3) meta-analysis identifies only two (out of the seven examined) studies in which the NFU scale predicted choice. Nevertheless, given the theoretical link between the individual characteristics of uniqueness and conformity and the option characteristics of self- and other-expressive, we examine whether the NFU scale offers a rival account for our findings regarding choices between self- and other-expressive options.

In summary, building on the distinction between self- and other-expressive options, we identify various consumer choice dilemmas and related option types that can be mapped onto this dimension and are expected to respond similarly to conditions that promote self- versus other-expression. The specific conditions we test in the current research include priming self-expression, which is expected to increase self-expressive choice behavior, and expecting to be evaluated, which is expected to increase the share of other-expressive options. We also test whether NFU moderates choice between these options.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We next describe four studies designed to test the distinction between self-expressive and other-expressive options and the conditions that systematically affect choices of self-/other-expressive options across the problem types. In the pilot study, we test the self- versus other-expressive distinction as it relates to extreme versus compromise, risky versus safe, mixed-value versus all-average, hedonic versus utilitarian, and HP/Q versus LP/Q options. Furthermore, we show that other dimensions, including perceived satisfaction and effort, do not systematically differentiate these choice options. In Study 1, we show that priming self-expression leads to more self-expressive choice behavior across three problem types (extreme, risky, and hedonic). In Study 2, we differentiate the self-expression dimension from risk seeking, by showing that priming only risk seeking increases the share of risky gambles but not the share of other self-expressive options. Finally, in Study 3, we show that making consumers accountable for their choices by telling them that their choices might be evaluated by others decreases the share of self-expressive options across the

five problem types (risky, extreme, hedonic, mixed value, and HP/Q). We also show in this study that the NFU scale does not systematically predict choice between self- and other-expressive options, nor does it moderate the effect of the expected evaluation manipulation.

PILOT STUDY: CLASSIFYING SELF-EXPRESSIVE AND OTHER-EXPRESSIVE OPTIONS

The objective of the pilot study was to test our assumptions regarding the perceptions of different choice options as self- versus other-expressive. Participants evaluated choices that other participants had (supposedly) made in a previous study, on three items measuring self-expression (how self-expressive, independent, and preferences expressive each choice is), three items measuring other-expression (how conventional, ordinary, and traditional each choice is), and two items measuring the unrelated constructs of satisfaction and effort. Participants evaluated choices in the five problem types: extreme versus compromise, risky gambles versus sure gains, HP/Q versus LP/Q, hedonic versus utilitarian, and mixed value versus all average. We expected the three self-expression and three other-expression items to systematically differentiate self-expressive and other-expressive options, such that, for example, extreme options and risky gambles would be perceived as more self-expressive, more independent, and better expressive of one's preferences, but less conventional, less traditional, and less ordinary. In contrast, we did not expect to find systematic differences on the two unrelated items of satisfaction and effort. In addition, we expected that the six self- versus other-expressive items would map on a single bipolar factor.

Method

A total of 106 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 34$ years, 35% male) were recruited through an online respondent pool. They completed a short questionnaire in exchange for a chance to win one of ten \$25 gift certificates for a major online retailer. To avoid excessive repetition and respondent fatigue, 36 participants evaluated choices between extreme and compromise options and between hedonic and utilitarian options, 37 participants evaluated choices between risky gambles and sure gains and between mixed-value and all-average options, and the remaining 33 participants evaluated choices between HP/Q options and LP/Q options (see examples in the Appendix and Web Appendix A [http://

www.marketingpower.com/jmraug11]). Each participant saw two or three replications of each problem type.

For each problem, participants read about the choices that other participants supposedly made in a previous study. For example, they read about Participant 16, who chose Hotel A, which is the all-average option, and about Participant 87, who chose Hotel B, which is the mixed-value option. They were then asked to evaluate these choices on eight seven-point scales, by indicating the degree to which each choice (1) is more self-expressive, (2) is more conventional, (3) is more independent, (4) is more expressive of the participant's personal preferences, (5) is more ordinary, (6) is more traditional, (7) leads to more satisfaction, and (8) requires more effort. The scales' anchors were the options each participant supposedly chose. For example, the "self-expressive" item for one of the all-average/mixed-value problems was "Which choice is more self-expressive?" with anchors at 1 = "Participant 16's choice of Hotel A," 4 = "no difference," and 7 = "Participant 87's choice of Hotel B" (see the Appendix). In some cases, 1 was anchored as the "other-expressive" option (as in the preceding example), and in other cases, 1 was anchored as the "self-expressive" option.

We expected to find that the options assumed to be more self-expressive would be rated as more self-expressive, more independent, and a better expression of personal preferences across all problem types than the other-expressive options, which in turn would be rated as more ordinary, more traditional, and more conventional. In contrast, we did not expect to find systematic differences on the two unrelated items of satisfaction and effort.

Results and Discussion

The choice ratings supported our predictions (see Table 1). Specifically, compared with the corresponding other-expressive options, self-expressive options (i.e., extreme, risky, mixed value, HP/Q, and hedonic) were rated as significantly more self-expressive, more independent, and more expressive of personal preferences. In addition, these options were rated as less conventional, less ordinary, and less traditional.¹ For example, the mixed-value option was

¹The ratings were not significantly different from the midpoint of 4 in only two cases, but they were in the expected direction: rating extreme options on the independent scale ($M = 4.19$) and rating risky options on the personal preferences scale ($M = 4.05$).

Table 1

MEAN (SD) PERCEPTION OF CHOICE OPTIONS ON THE SELF-EXPRESSIVE AND OTHER-EXPRESSIVE SCALES (PILOT STUDY)

	<i>Sure-Risky</i>	<i>All-Average-Mixed</i>	<i>LP/Q-HP/Q</i>	<i>Compromise-Extreme</i>	<i>Utilitarian-Hedonic</i>
Self-expressive	4.58* (1.36)	4.66** (1.33)	4.29* (.84)	4.46* (1.20)	5.69*** (.92)
Independent	4.68*** (1.35)	4.53** (1.02)	4.25* (.70)	4.19n.s. (.90)	4.42* (1.23)
Personal preferences	4.05n.s. (1.06)	4.54* (1.27)	4.46* (.99)	4.51* (1.29)	4.83*** (1.29)
Conventional	2.15*** (1.43)	2.87*** (1.13)	3.29*** (.95)	3.33* (1.47)	3.32*** (1.21)
Ordinary	2.47*** (1.30)	2.50*** (1.09)	3.43** (1.15)	3.09*** (1.29)	3.00*** (1.31)
Traditional	2.41*** (1.29)	2.53*** (1.19)	3.38** (.94)	3.22*** (1.10)	3.25*** (1.03)
Satisfaction	4.29n.s. (1.58)	4.25n.s. (1.2)	4.6** (1.17)	4.4** (1.17)	4.42** (1.25)
Effort	4.87*** (1.25)	4.53** (1.09)	4.14n.s. (.96)	4.13n.s. (.95)	3.57** (.80)

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .005$.

Notes: All scales are recoded such that 7 refers to the "self-expressive" option (i.e., risky, mixed, HP/Q, extreme, and hedonic) and 1 to the "other-expressive" option (i.e., sure, all-average, LP/Q, compromise, and utilitarian). Significance tests are based on a one-sample t-test against the midpoint 4.

rated higher than the midpoint 4 on the self-expressive, independent, and personal preference scales (4.66, 4.53, and 4.54, respectively; $ps < .05$) and lower than 4 on the conventionality, ordinary, and traditional scales (2.87, 2.50, and 2.53, respectively; $ps < .005$; see complete results in Table 1).

To test whether these six items indeed represent one bipolar dimension, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis. Because the scales we used were comparative (e.g., “Which option is *more* self-expressive?”), respondents might have differed in how they anchored on the midpoint of the scale. In such situations, ordinary factor analysis may reveal two unipolar factors for which the data actually represent one bipolar dimension (Marsh 1996; Maydeu-Olivares and Coffman 2006). To control for this potential nuisance variation in response style, we fit our data using the one-factor model with a random intercept as suggested by Maydeu-Olivares and Coffman (2006). We use the LISREL software and the covariance matrix for each problem type.

As we show in Table 2, this model fits the data well for all problem types, as evident by the nonsignificant chi-square values, low Akaike information criterion (AIC) values (see Akaike 1987), and comparative fit index (CFI) value higher than the recommended cutoff of .95 (Hu and Bentler 1999). For example, for the sure/risky problems, $\chi^2 = 2.9$ ($p = .94$), AIC = 28.84, and CFI = 1 (for complete results, see Table 2). As we show in Table 3, for each problem type, the three self-expressive items load positively on that factor, and the three other-expressive items load negatively. For example, the three factor loadings for the all-average/mixed-value problems for the self-expressive, independent, and personal preferences items are .41, .72, and .64, respectively. The three factor loading for the conventional, ordinary, and traditional items are $-.54$, $-.86$, and -1.13 , respectively. This is consistent with our analysis that the self- versus other-expression distinction is unidimensional.

Finally, consistent with our predictions, there were no systematic differences on the effort and satisfaction measures

(see Table 1). For example, in some cases, choosing a self-expressive option (e.g., a risky gamble) was rated as requiring more effort; in other cases, choosing an other-expressive option (e.g., a utilitarian option) was rated as requiring more effort; and in other cases (e.g., extreme options), ratings on that scale were not significantly different from the midpoint of 4.

To summarize, our pilot study supports the distinction between self-expressive and other-expressive options. Specifically, we find that extreme, risky, HP/Q, mixed-value, and hedonic options are rated as more self-expressive, as more independent, and as a better expression of personal preferences. In contrast, compromise, sure gains, LP/Q, all-average, and utilitarian options are all rated as more conventional, traditional, and ordinary. In addition, our confirmatory factor analysis reveals that this distinction is indeed unidimensional. Finally, these options do not systematically differ on other measures, such as choice satisfaction and effort. Thus, while previous research has identified some of these options as (un)conventional (e.g., compromise choice; Simonson 1989), to the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic demonstration that these and additional options are indeed perceived as such along the underlying dimension of self- versus other-expression. We now turn to examine the implication of this distinction with respect to the common impact of particular manipulations across the various choice problems.

STUDY 1: PRIMING EXPRESSIVENESS

In Study 1, we test the effect of priming on the likelihood of selecting self-expressive options. The effect of priming on subsequent behavior and choice has been documented in various contexts using different priming manipulations. For example, Maimaran and Wheeler (2008) show that exposure to arrays consisting of the same shapes and a single distinct shape (e.g., one square among five circles) led to more uniqueness seeking when choosing among chocolates and notepads. Kay et al. (2004) show that pictures of business-related objects (e.g., briefcases) led to more competitive behavior in strategic situations. Building on the extensive literature on priming effects (e.g., Higgins 1996; Wheeler and Petty 2001) and the current analysis, we expect that exposing consumers to concepts related to expressing one’s preferences, as opposed to concepts related to defaults and conventional behavior, will lead to more self-expressive choices across different problems.

In the current study, we exposed participants to the different concepts using the standard sentence-unscrambling task (e.g., Bargh and Chartrand 2000), whereby construct-related words are embedded in sentences. Some of the participants saw words related to self-expression, such as “express” and “independent.” Other participants saw words

Table 2
GOODNESS OF FIT STATISTICS FOR THE RANDOM-INTERCEPT ONE-FACTOR MODEL (PILOT STUDY)

	χ^2	<i>df.</i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>AIC</i>	<i>CAIC</i>	<i>CFI</i>
Sure-risky	2.9	8	.94	28.84	62.06	1
All-average	3.44	8	.9	29.44	62.66	1
Price-quality	2.76	8	.95	28.61	61.83	.97
Compromise	7.2	8	.52	33.1	66.32	1
Hedonic-utilitarian	9.16	8	.33	33.96	67.18	.96

Notes: AIC = Akaike information criterion, CAIC = consistent AIC, and CFI = comparative fit index.

Table 3
FACTOR LOADINGS BASED ON THE COVARIANCE MATRIX (PILOT STUDY)

	<i>Sure-Risky</i>	<i>All-Average-Mixed</i>	<i>LP/Q-HP/Q</i>	<i>Compromise-Extreme</i>	<i>Utilitarian-Hedonic</i>
Self-expressive	.30	.41	.59	1.02	.61
Independent	.61	.72	.61	.29	.44
Personal preferences	.16	.64	.45	.75	.87
Conventional	$-.72$	$-.54$	$-.80$	-1.24	$-.92$
Ordinary	$-.89$	$-.86$	-1.14	-1.50	-1.17
Traditional	-1.09	-1.13	-1.16	-1.01	$-.85$

related to other-expression, such as “conventional” and “default.” The remaining participants saw words related to neither self-expression nor other-expression. Following the priming manipulation, participants made several product choices. Given our concern that the impact of the priming manipulation would fade, and the need to test more than one replication for each problem type, we tested the effect of priming on three problem types only: (1) extreme versus compromise options, (2) risky gambles versus sure gains, and (3) hedonic versus utilitarian options. Consistent with the previous analysis, we expected that exposure to self-expression primes would increase the share of the self-expressive options across the three problem types.

Method

Participants ($N = 161$, $M_{\text{age}} = 32$ years, 30% male) were recruited through an online participant pool and were offered a chance to win one of six \$50 gift certificates for a major online retailer. The study had three priming conditions: self-expression, other-expression, and control. As we indicated, the three conditions were operationalized through a sentence-unscrambling task, in which participants were asked to create a grammatically correct sentence using four of the five words given. For example, from “she never independent was block,” participants could create “she was never independent.”

The three conditions differed in the target words embedded in the sentences. In the self-expression condition, the target words were “adventurous,” “bold,” “change,” “daring,” “deviate,” “differ,” “different,” “differentiate,” “distinctive,” “express,” “extraordinary,” “extreme,” “independent,” “individual,” “remarkable,” “risky,” “self,” “unconventional,” “unique,” and “unusual.” In the other-expression condition, the target words were “balance,” “cautious,” “common,” “conform,” “conservative,” “conventional,” “default,” “follow,” “imitate,” “maintain,” “moderate,” “ordinary,” “routine,” “safe,” “safety,” “same,” “similar,” “sure,” “timid,” and “traditional.” In the control condition, none of the words were related to the primed constructs.

To maintain (and refresh) the priming manipulation, participants saw two blocks of sentences, each consisting of 15 sentences. In the “self-expression” and “other-expression” conditions, 20 sentences contained a target word. The remaining 10 sentences were not related to the primed constructs. Following the first block, participants made five choices, and following the second block, they made four choices. As indicated, the choice problems presented a choice between compromise and extreme options (e.g., three portable barbecue grills, one with intermediate levels of cooking area and weight and two with extreme values on these attributes), between sure gains and risky gambles (e.g., a choice between receiving \$40 for sure and a 50% chance to win \$200 and 50% to win nothing), and between utilitarian and hedonic options (e.g., a choice between a \$50 grocery store voucher and a \$50 restaurant voucher). Participants made a total of nine choices—three of each type. In this and the following studies, no two problems of the same type were shown consecutively.

In the last part of the study, participants completed the funneled debriefing form (adapted from Bargh and Chartrand 2000) to identify any suspicion or demand effects. Four participants (two from the self-expression condition and two from the other-expression condition) noticed the

reoccurring topic in the priming task and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Participants also completed various mood and involvement measures; no differences among the conditions were found on these scales ($ps > .3$).

Results and Discussion

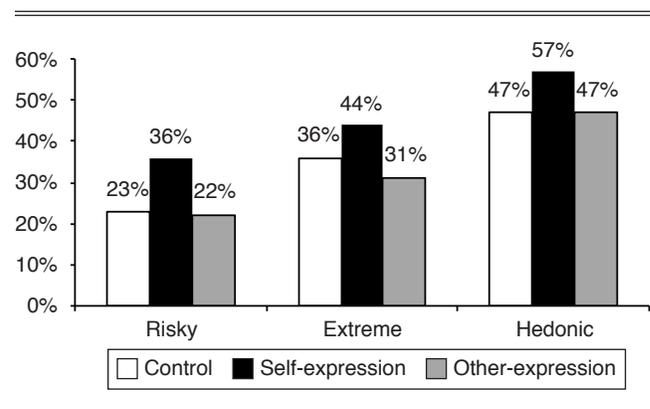
As we show in Figure 1, compared with participants in the other-expression and control conditions, participants in the self-expression condition were more likely to choose the self-expressive options across the three tested problem types. Specifically, across the three sure/risky problems, 36% of those primed with self-expression chose the risky (i.e., self-expressive) option, compared with 23% in the control condition and 22% of in the other-expression condition.² Similarly, across the three compromise problems, 44% chose an extreme option when primed with self-expression, compared with 36% in the control condition and 31% in the other-expression condition. Finally, across the three hedonic/utilitarian problems, 57% chose the hedonic option when primed with self-expression, compared with 47% in both the control and other-expression conditions.

To test the significance of these effects, we ran a series of logistic regression models. Two dummy variables for the three conditions were created. For each problem type, two dummy variables for the three replications were created. We first ran a model with choice as the dependent variable (choice of the self-expressive option, coded as 1) and the dummy variables for conditions, replications, and their interactions as the independent variables. Because none of the interactions were significant (all $ps > .3$), we dropped these interactions to maximize power.

We found the expected difference between the self-expression and control conditions across all problem types: For the sure/risky problems, Wald $\chi^2 = 7.34$, $p < .05$; for the

²For all problem types, these percentages represent the share of the “self-expressive” option when pooling across the different replications. For example, in the self-expression priming condition, 34% chose the risky option in the first problem, 26% chose it in the second problem, and 48% in the third problem; thus, the overall preference for the risky option in this condition is 36%. In all studies reported next, we report results pooled across the different replications. Results at the individual-problem level are available on request.

Figure 1
PRIMING SELF-EXPRESSION INCREASES SHARE OF
EXTREME, RISKY, AND HEDONIC OPTIONS (STUDY 1)



hedonic/utilitarian problems, Wald $\chi^2 = 3.6, p < .06$; and for the compromise problems, Wald $\chi^2 = 2.36, p = .12$. In addition, the differences between the self-expression and other-expression conditions were also significant: For the sure/risky problems, 36% versus 22%, Wald $\chi^2 = 7.86, p < .05$; for the hedonic/utilitarian problems, 57% versus 47%, Wald $\chi^2 = 3.8, p < .06$; and for the extreme/compromise problems, 44% versus 31%, Wald $\chi^2 = 6.13, p < .05$. Differences between the other-expression and control conditions were not significant in all problem types ($ps > .4$).

Overall, these results are consistent with the assumption that self-expression priming promotes choices of self-expressive options across three problem types (risky, extreme, and hedonic). More generally, these findings provide additional support for the proposition that the various choice problems we study share a common self- versus other-expression dimension. It is noteworthy, however, that priming other-expression-related concepts, such as conventionality and default behavior, did not increase the share of the other-expressive options. It is possible that a stronger manipulation is required to increase the share of the otherwise default, other-expressive options. We address this issue further in Study 3.

A possible limitation of this study is that, in addition to priming self-expression, we may have primed other constructs, in particular, risk seeking. Specifically, some of the target words were related to risk seeking and risk avoidance (e.g., risky, sure, safe, safety). Thus, it is possible that the priming manipulation made the sure/risky dimension more salient than the self- versus other-expression dimension. To test this alternative account, we conducted Study 2, in which we primed only risk-related constructs and examined choices of self-expressive options.³

STUDY 2: PRIMING RISK-RELATED CONSTRUCTS

We tested the risk-based rival account in Study 2 by priming only risk seeking and risk avoidance; this manipulation involved asking respondents to recall a time they took or avoided risks. This paradigm has been used in previous studies to prime different emotions and constructs such as anger (e.g., Khan, Maimaran, and Dhar 2011; Lerner and Keltner 2001) and power (e.g., Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003); in these studies, participants were asked to recall a time in which, for example, they felt angry at someone or something or had power over someone. In the current study, some participants were asked to recall a time they took risks, others were asked to recall a time they avoided risks, and others were asked to write about the previous day's events. Following the priming manipulation, participants made choices similar to those in Study 1. Consistent with our preceding analysis, we expected the risk-seeking prime to increase only the share of the risky gambles but not the share of the other self-expressive options—namely, extreme, mixed value, and hedonic.

Method

Participants ($N = 106$, $M_{\text{age}} = 35$ years, 34% male) were recruited through an online participant pool and were offered

a chance to win one of four \$25 gift certificates for a major online retailer. The study had three priming conditions: risk seeking, risk avoidance, and control, operationalized through the “recall-a-time” paradigm. In the risk-seeking condition, participants were asked to write about three events when they took risks and behaved in a risk-seeking way. They were then asked to elaborate on one of these events. In the risk-avoidance condition, respondents were asked to write about three events when they played it safe and avoided taking risks. They were then asked to elaborate on one of them. In the control condition, participants wrote about three events that happened to them the previous day and then elaborated on one of them. Following the priming manipulation, all participants were presented with choice problems similar to those used in Study 1 (i.e., choice between extreme and compromise options, between hedonic and utilitarian options, and between sure gains and risky gambles) and two additional problems describing choice between mixed-value and all-average options. To disguise a possible connection between the priming task and the choice task, the choice problems appeared in a different font and color than those used in the priming task.

In the last part of the study, participants completed the same funneled debriefing form from Study 1. No participant reported a connection between the tasks. Participants also completed various mood measures. As in Study 1, no differences among the conditions were found on these scales ($ps > .2$).

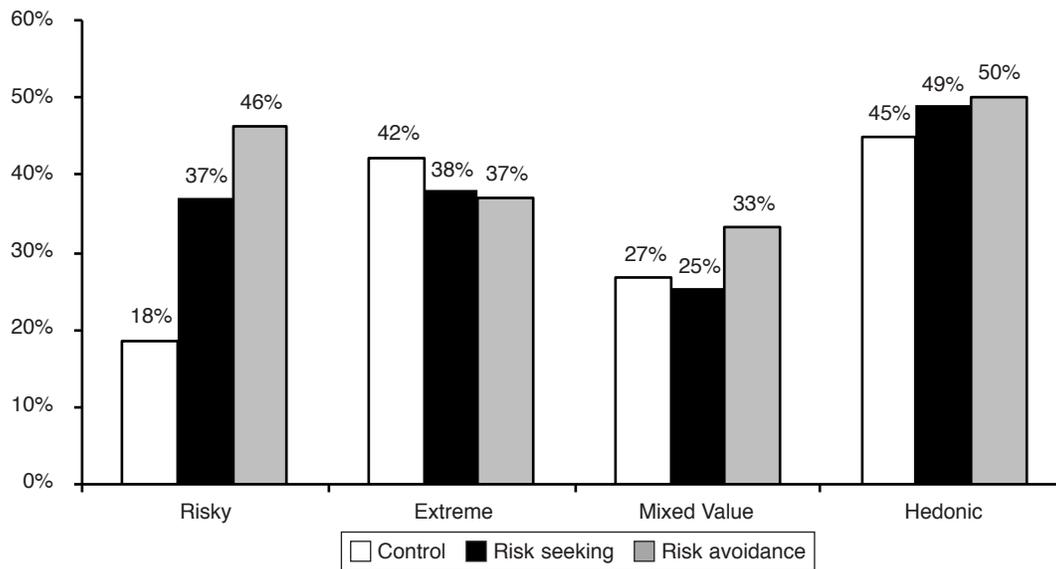
Results and Discussion

If merely priming the risky/sure dimension is indeed sufficient to induce self-expressive choice behavior across different choice situations, we would expect to find an increase in the share of the self-expressive options across the four different problem types when primed with risk seeking. If self-expression and risk seeking are distinct constructs, we would expect the risk primes to affect only the share of the risky gambles. As expected, we found that only the share of the risky option increased from 18% in the control condition to 37% among those primed with risk seeking (averaged across the three replications; Wald $\chi^2 = 8.65, p < .005$). In contrast, the share of the extreme, mixed-value, and hedonic option was not significantly different in the control, risk-seeking, and risk-avoidance conditions (see Figure 2). Specifically, the share of the extreme option was 42% in the control condition, 38% in the risk-seeking condition, and 37% in the risk-avoidance condition; the share of the mixed-value option was 27% in the control condition, 25% in the risk-seeking condition, and 33% in the risk-avoidance condition; and the share of the hedonic option was 45% in the control condition, 49% in the risk-seeking condition, and 50% in the risk-avoidance condition. None of these differences were significant ($ps > .25$).

Notably, the share of the risky option was higher in the risk-avoidance condition (46%) than in the control condition (18%; Wald $\chi^2 = 19.6, p < .005$) and higher than in the risk-seeking condition, though not significantly (46% vs. 37%; $p > .2$). Although not related to the current research, this finding might indicate that recalling avoidance of risks induces regret, which in turn may lead to increased risk taking in subsequent situations.

³We also tested that the priming manipulation successfully primed self-expression. See Web Appendix B (<http://www.marketingpower.com/jmraug11>).

Figure 2
PRIMING RISK SEEKING INCREASES ONLY THE SHARE OF RISKY OPTIONS (STUDY 2)



To summarize, Study 2 suggests that priming only risk-related constructs does not induce self-expressive choices across problem types other than choice between sure gains and risky gambles. This supports the distinction between the self-expressive and the risk-seeking constructs. Thus, while certain self-expressive options can be perceived as involving more risk, such as extreme options, it is clear that risk seeking and risk avoidance cannot explain choice between the entire range of self- and other-expressive options.

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate that priming constructs related to self-expression, but not to risk-seeking, leads to more self-expressive choices across different problem types, such as choice of extreme and hedonic options. Next, we test a condition that we expect to have the opposite effect—that is, a condition that leads to the suppression of self-expression. Specifically, we examine the impact of expecting to be evaluated by others on choice between self- and other-expressive options.

STUDY 3: THE EFFECT OF EXPECTING TO BE EVALUATED

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. While Study 1 focused on a condition that promotes choosing self-expressive options, Study 3 tests a condition that is expected to suppress the choice shares of such options. Specifically, we examine the impact of making consumers accountable for their choices on their tendency to select self- versus other-expressive options. In many investigations, accountability refers to “an implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called on to justify one’s beliefs, feelings and actions to others” (Lerner and Tetlock 1999, p. 255). Accountability has been manipulated in various ways, such as identifiability (participants expect that their actions will be linked to their name; e.g., Simonson and Nye 1992), expected evaluation (participants expect to be evaluated by others; e.g., Simonson and Nowlis 2000), and reason giving (e.g., Simonson 1989). Simonson and Nowlis (2000) distinguish between

expected evaluation and reason giving in the context of several choice problems, such as choices between compromises and extremes. Their findings were consistent with the conclusion that expecting to be evaluated (without the opportunity to explain one’s choice) promotes conformity and preference for options that are more likely to be approved by others.

In the context of this research, we propose that expecting to be evaluated will systematically suppress the tendency for self-expression and, correspondingly, will decrease the likelihood of choosing self-expressive options. Specifically, choosing other-expressive options, such as compromises and sure gains, is more likely to be approved by others and less likely to be criticized (e.g., Simonson 1989). We test this hypothesis for all five problem types—choices between risky gambles and sure gains, between extreme and compromise options, between HP/Q and LP/Q options, between mixed-value and all-average options, and between hedonic and utilitarian options—by manipulating the expectation of being evaluated.

A secondary goal of this study was to examine whether the NFU scale, which assesses individuals’ motivation to be distinct and counterconform (Snyder and Fromkin 1977), offers a systematic rival account to the effect of being evaluated on choice. That is, we examine whether a measured NFU can predict the impact of expecting to be evaluated on choices across the set of problem types examined in this research. As discussed previously, uniqueness theory (Snyder and Fromkin 1980) distinguishes between the uniqueness and conformity motivations. Our framework classifies a wide range of options as self-expressive (or unconventional) or other-expressive (or conventional). Given the theoretical parallel between the two distinctions, it is possible that consumers high on NFU will make more self-expressive, unconventional choices. However, as we noted, this scale has been shown to moderate choice behavior in only a relatively small number of cases (e.g., preferences for scarce products; e.g., Lynn 1991). Therefore, the scale may

not produce consistent results when predicting choice between self- and other-expressive options. To test the effect of NFU on choice between self- and other-expressive options, we measured participants' NFU after they completed all choices.

Method

Participants (N = 131, M_{age} = 35.6 years, 33% male) were recruited through an online participants pool and received a \$5 gift certificate for a major online retailer in exchange for participating. The study had a one-factor (evaluation: expected vs. not expected) between-subjects design. In the not-expected-evaluation condition, participants made ten choices involving the five problem types indicated previously. Participants considered two replications of each problem type.

In the expected-evaluation condition, participants were told the following: "Your choices might be used to illustrate effective or ineffective decisions in our future studies. For example, we may show the choices you made to other respondents and ask them to judge the quality of the choices you made." They were then presented with the same ten choice problems presented in the not-expected-evaluation condition. In both conditions, each problem was presented on a new web page. The expected-evaluation manipulation was repeated after each problem, as participants were told, "You may now proceed to the next page. Please remember that your choices may be used to illustrate effective or ineffective decisions."

After completing all choices, all participants completed the NFU scale (Snyder and Fromkin 1977), which consists of 32 items, such as "I would rather be known for always trying new ideas than for employing well trusted methods." Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item using a 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") scale.

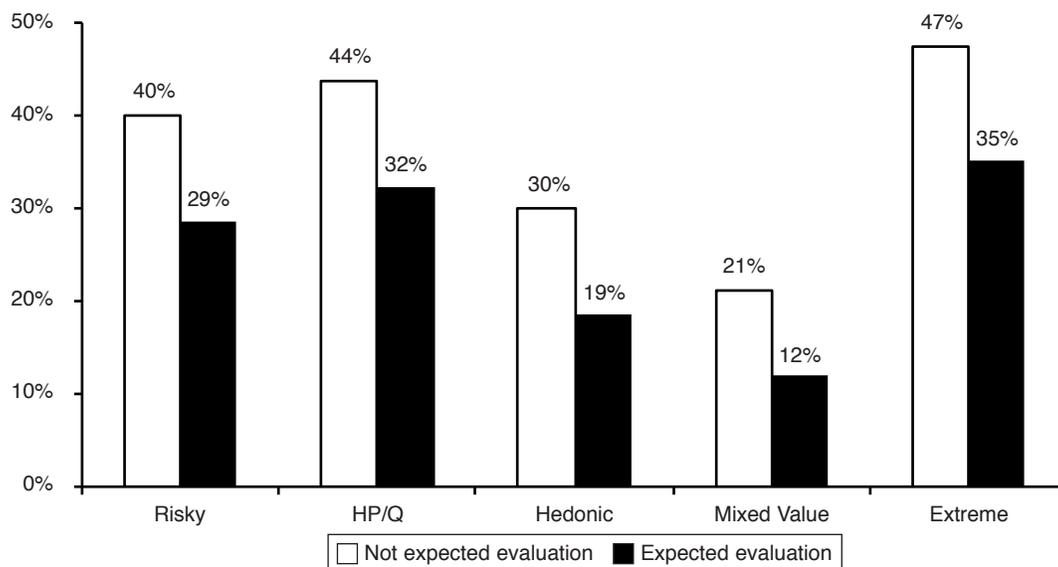
In the last part of the study, all participants completed a debriefing form, similar to the one used in previous studies. No participant reported a connection between the tasks.

Results and Discussion

Expected-evaluation analysis. As we show in Figure 3, across all five problem types, participants in the expected-evaluation condition were less likely to choose the self-expressive options compared with those in the not-expected-evaluation condition. In particular, the share of the risky option decreased from 40% in the not-expected-evaluation condition to 28.7% in the expected-evaluation condition (Wald $\chi^2 = 3.53, p < .06$), the share of the HP/Q decreased from 43.6% to 32.4% (Wald $\chi^2 = 3.33, p < .07$), the share of the hedonic option decreased from 30.1% to 18.7% (Wald $\chi^2 = 4.3, p < .05$), the share of the mixed-value option decreased from 21.2% to 12.1% (Wald $\chi^2 = 3.48, p < .06$), and the share of the extreme option decreased from 47.4% to 35.2% (Wald $\chi^2 = 3.89, p < .05$).

NFU analysis. To test the effect of NFU on choice, we ran a series of additional logistics models with the expected-evaluation manipulation, the continuous measure of NFU (mean of the 32 items), and the interaction term as the independent variables and choice as the dependent variable. The only significant effect of NFU was on the choice between compromise and extreme options, such that high-NFU people were more likely to choose extreme options. This result is consistent with Simonson and Nowlis (2000), who find a similar reduction in the compromise effect among high-NFU people in some of their studies. No other effects involving NFU (main effects or interactions) were significant, suggesting that overall, NFU is not an appropriate predictor of choice between self- and other-expressive options, nor does it moderate the effect of the expected-evaluation manipulation. When discussing why the NFU scale often fails to predict choice, Snyder (1992) suggests using the three subscales of this scale (lack of concern about others [15 items], desire to not always follow the rules [11 items], and willingness to defend one's desires publicly [6 items]). We therefore reanalyzed the data using these three sub-

Figure 3
EXPECTED EVALUATION DECREASES THE SHARE OF THE SELF-EXPRESSIVE OPTIONS (STUDY 3)



scales. As with the full scale, none of these subscales consistently predicted or moderated choice.

While null effects are difficult to interpret, this result suggests that the self- versus other-expressive distinction may encompass more than uniqueness and conformity motivations, as assessed by the NFU scale. Indeed, as our studies demonstrate, this distinction applies to a wide range of options that have not been previously linked to uniqueness and conformity motivations, such as choice between hedonic and utilitarian products and between LP/Q and HP/Q.

To summarize, in this study, we identify an important condition that suppresses self-expression and thus leads to increased choice of other-expressive options. Specifically, when consumers expect their choices to be evaluated by others, they are less likely to choose self-expressive options across the five problem types, namely, risky gambles, HP/Q, hedonic, mixed-value, and extreme options. Moreover, we find that the NFU scale neither predicts nor moderates choice between self- and other-expressive options.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Studying individual consumer choice problems by examining one problem type in each research project has certain obvious advantages. However, this approach also has a potentially significant limitation in that it may cause researchers to ignore common patterns and potentially overlook more parsimonious accounts for a broader class of problems. In the current research, we proposed that several central consumer choice problems, which have been previously studied separately, are related to one common dimension of options—self- versus other-expression. In particular, we argue that more/less conventional options, such as compromise/extreme, utilitarian/hedonic, and safe/risky options, are inherently perceived as less/more self-expressive or more/less other-expressive. In this section, we summarize the findings and discuss their theoretical and practical implications.

Summary of Findings and Theoretical Implications

In the pilot study, we supported the distinction between self- and other-expressive options across five problem types: extreme versus compromise options, risky versus safe gambles, hedonic versus utilitarian options, mixed-value versus all-average options, and HP/Q versus LP/Q versus options. Next, we investigated the impact of conditions that enhance or suppress self-expression, which were correspondingly expected to increase/decrease the share of self-expressive options. In Study 1, we showed that priming self-expression using a sentence-unscrambling task led to increased choice of self-expressive options, including extreme, risky, and hedonic options. In Study 2, we differentiated self-expression from risk seeking by showing that priming only risk seeking increased the share of risky options but not the share of other self-expressive options (mixed value, hedonic, and extreme). Finally, in Study 3, we found that making consumers accountable for their choices by telling them that their choices might be evaluated by others suppressed self-expression and led to a decrease in the share of the self-expressive options across the five problem types (extreme, mixed value, risky, HP/Q, and hedonic). The NFU scale neither predicted nor moderated these choices.

These findings show that triggering or suppressing the desire to express the self using different manipulations has a

robust and systematic effect across a wide range of choice problems. Accordingly, although the existing separate accounts for each phenomenon provide additional insights, the current research suggests that these phenomena have much in common. In turn, this common element allows us to make more global predictions that apply to a diverse set of consumer choice problems. It is not common to find in a single research investigation multiple factors that affect choice in a similar way across problem types, such that some factors lead to one pattern of choice (e.g., priming self-expression increases choice of self-expressive options), others to another pattern of choice (e.g., expecting to be evaluated increases choice of other-expressive options), and other factors do not affect choice behavior (e.g., priming risk seeking does not affect choice of self-expressive options).

Further research might examine additional conditions that elicit or inhibit self-expressive versus other-expressive choices. For example, in an unpublished study, we find that asking people to write about their hobbies (versus writing about their everyday experiences), which presumably triggers a greater desire to express the self, increased the share of the self-expressive options tested (mixed value and risky). In another unpublished study, we find that when respondents first write attributes that characterize them, they are more likely to choose extreme options. Other primes of self- versus other-expression, such as independent versus interdependent frames (e.g., Aaker and Lee 2001), are also expected to have a systematic effect on choice. In particular, independent framing is expected to increase the share of the self-expressive options compared with the interdependent framing. Indeed, expressing the self through choice may not be universal and is dependent on cultural and self-schemas (e.g., Kim and Sherman 2003; Savani, Markus, and Conner 2008). Choice setting, such as public versus private (e.g., Ratner and Kahn 2002), is also expected to affect choice of self- versus other-expressive options. Because the presence of others is likely to increase accountability (e.g., Guerin 1993), a public setting is likely to suppress self-expression and decrease the share of the self-expressive options.

In addition, further research might examine whether the self- versus other-expressive interpretation can be extended to other choice contexts, such as choice deferral (e.g., Dhar 1997), in which the no-choice option would be classified as the conventional, other-expressive option. Relatedly, it is noteworthy that not all options can be classified as self- versus other-expressive. For example, when choice is based purely on tastes and no option represents a more conventional taste (e.g., a choice between a blue or green mug), neither option would be classified as self- or other-expressive.

Finally, further research might examine how the self- versus other-expressive distinction interacts with chronic individual tendencies, such as being generally conservative and traditional. For example, it is possible that for a very conservative consumer, the otherwise other-expressive, safe option would be more self-expressive.⁴ However, as discussed previously, we propose that the options themselves represent compliance to others and conventional behavior. Therefore, we hypothesize that even for such a consumer,

⁴We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this issue.

choosing the safe option represents other-expressive behavior. Indeed, as demonstrated in our pilot study, classification of these options is not dependent on specific chronic motivations, suggesting that the perception of certain options as self-expressive or other-expressive is broad and pervasive. Moreover, as the results of Study 3 demonstrate, the NFU scale did not predict choice between self- and other-expressive options, nor did it moderate the effect of the expected evaluation manipulation. This suggests that the situational prime of other-expression (in this case, telling consumers that their choice will be evaluated by others) is a stronger predictor of choice than chronic tendencies. Although not the focus of this study, this last result relates to the personality-versus-situation debate (e.g., Epstein and O'Brien 1985), which focuses on the relative ability of personality versus situational factors to predict behavior. It seems that at least in the case of choice between self- and other-expressive options, situational factors have a higher predictive power than personality factors.

Practical Implications

The current research has significant practical implications. The current environment, with communication channels such as Facebook and Twitter, encourages both self- and other-expression across a wide range of choices. Consumers frequently share with their “closest” friends what they do and why, often referring to choices between options that differ on the dimension of self- versus other-expression. For example, movies, books, restaurants, and many other recommendation and experience categories reflect different levels of attempts to express the self versus trying to conform to the likely tastes of others. We would expect media such as Facebook or Twitter to potentially promote both self-expression and other-expression, depending on various situational factors. For example, our findings regarding the effect of expected evaluation suggests that when consumers are required to anticipate others’ preferences and follow them, they are likely to be less self-expressive in their “tweets.” Further research could identify other conditions that have specific effects within these types of media.

Furthermore, the established leader in a category is less likely to benefit from creating self-expressive conditions but is rather better-off promoting conventional behavior. As

a result, a compromise position or positioning an option as involving tradition and convention will be particularly beneficial to leaders and default options. Conversely, challengers might benefit more if they employ self-expressive tactics and positioning that are congruent with choices of such options.

More broadly, the prevalence of self- versus other-expression choice dilemmas suggests that marketers who consider that aspect should be able to obtain better insights into and make better predictions regarding consumer behavior across a wide range of problems. For example, inducing a desire to express the self with framing manipulations, store design, or product description can be used to enhance the attractiveness of compatible self-expressive options. Thus, attracting consumers’ attention to their own needs and desires by using, for example, slogans such as “what have you done for yourself today” may enhance self-expression and lead to more self-expressive choices. In addition, the use of nontraditional colors that stand out, such as red or orange, in product or logo design may be more appropriate when trying to induce consumers to choose the nontraditional, self-expressive options. Such subtle manipulations, similar to other priming manipulations, are less likely to create reactance to persuasion attempts, which may occur when more blatant manipulations are used. Finally, the fact that situational factors seem to be more powerful in this context than personality factors suggests that marketers can successfully manipulate framing of options and situational primes to affect choice in a desired direction, while not being overly concerned about individual tendencies over which they have no control.

To summarize, although the tendency of many marketers and marketing researchers is to focus on their specific problem because it is “unlike anything else,” our research suggests otherwise. In particular, we argued and demonstrated that a wide range of problems that consumers encounter in everyday life actually share a similar, basic dimension. Accordingly, it makes sense to study them as belonging to the same general category. Moreover, the cross-problem similarity suggests that both marketers and researchers can learn a great deal about a specific choice dilemma by drawing on findings regarding related consumer choice problems.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLE OF AN ALL-AVERAGE PROBLEM USED IN THE PILOT STUDY

Consider the following set of hotels:

<i>Hotel A</i>	Average quality (3 stars)	Average distance from center	Average service	Average room size
<i>Hotel B</i>	High quality (4 stars)	Long distance from center	Outstanding service	Small rooms

- Participant 16 chose Hotel A.
- Participant 87 chose Hotel B.

Now, please evaluate these choices on the following scales:

	Participant 16's Choice of Hotel A		No Difference			Participant 87's Choice of Hotel B	
Which choice is more self-expressive ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice is more conventional ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice is more independent ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice better expresses the participant's personal preferences ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice is more ordinary ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice is more traditional ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice leads to more satisfaction ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Which choice required more effort ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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