The Locus of Choice: Personal Causality and Satisfaction with Hedonic and Utilitarian Decisions

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Consumers may consume the same products or services with different goals, for example, for their own pleasure—a hedonic goal—or to achieve some higher level purpose—a utilitarian goal. This article investigates whether this difference in goals influences satisfaction with an outcome that was either self-chosen or externally determined. In four experiments we manipulate consumption goals, controlling for the outcomes, the option valence, and whether the externally made choice was determined by an expert or at random. Results show that the outcome of a self-made choice is more satisfying than the outcome of an externally made choice when the goal is hedonic but not when it is utilitarian. We hypothesize that this effect results from the greater perceived personal causality associated with terminally motivated activities, such as hedonic choices, relative to instrumentally motivated activities, such as utilitarian choices, and provide evidence that supports this explanation over alternative accounts.

Imagine a patron at the restaurant described above who is dining either for the sheer pleasure of tasting the food or to achieve some higher-level goal, for example, a better understanding of the local culture. In these two cases, would the diner’s satisfaction with the restaurant’s predetermined menu choices differ from the satisfaction she would experience with her own menu choices? In this article we examine the influence of these two types of consumption goals, hedonic versus utilitarian, on the evaluation of the same outcome that has been either chosen by the self or externally determined.

Western consumers are usually keen on making their own choices and are wary of situations in which choice is not provided (Brehm 1966; deCharms 1968; Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004; Markus and Schwartz 2010). Supporting this view, research has shown that personally made choices, as compared to externally made ones, lead to more favorable consequences, such as more positive affect and attitude toward the outcome (Deci and Ryan 1985; Langer 1975; Zuckerman et al. 1978). These results are explained by the prin-
ciple of rational choice theory, which assumes subjective utility to be maximized by the choice of the alternative that best matches decision makers’ well-defined preferences (Baumol and Ide 1956). The exercise of choice is, however, beneficial even to those consumers who do not have clearly stated preferences. Indeed, when people perceive to have freely chosen an outcome, they tend to boost its subjective value, resulting in an improved outcome evaluation (Festinger 1957; Gilbert et al. 1998; Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993).

More recent research has shown that the effect of choice on the evaluation of a decision outcome is not always positive. An increase in the size of the choice set (Brenner, Rottenstreich, and Sood 1999; Carmon, Wertenbroch, and Zeelenberg 2003; Iyengar and Lepper 2000) or in the apparent variety of the assortment (Huffman and Kahn 1998; Kahn and Wansink 2004; Mogilner, Rudnick, and Iyengar 2008) has been found to be cognitively and emotionally taxing, resulting in decreased satisfaction with and increased regret about the selected outcome. Personal traits and chronic goals of the decision makers can further exacerbate the detriments of choosing from a large number of options. For example, decision makers with weaker preferences are more prone to be overwhelmed by large assortments than those with stronger preferences and are therefore less confident with their choice (Chernev 2003). Similarly, individuals who strive to make optimal decisions by carefully scrutinizing many alternatives are likely to be less satisfied than those who search for “good enough” solutions, despite obtaining objectively superior decision outcomes (Iyengar, Wells, and Schwartz 2006).

Even when the choices are limited, choice-set composition and personal characteristics may negatively influence choosers’ well-being. Research has shown that the heightened conflict experienced when selecting from among all undesirable, as compared to all desirable, options causes a personally made choice to be less satisfying than an externally determined one (Botti and Iyengar 2004). Empirical evidence also has revealed that cultural traits and social norms reinforcing chronic goals of collegiality versus individuality make a self-chosen option less attractive and motivating than an option chosen by another (Iyengar and Lepper 1999; Markus and Schwartz 2010).

In this article, we control for both the type of the choice-set alternatives and the stable traits and goals of the decision makers to examine the moderating effect of two specific consumption goals—hedonic and utilitarian—on satisfaction with self-made versus externally made choices. As the initial diner’s example illustrates, hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals may be malleable, depending on how the same decision is framed by the consumer, although for many product and service categories consumers would tend to one characterization or the other (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000).

PERSONAL CAUSALITY AND OUTCOME SATISFACTION

In his seminal work, Richard deCharms (1968) posits that human beings strive to be causal agents, that is, to feel themselves to be the origins of their behaviors. This perception, that a specific action is one’s own because it has been determined by the self and not by a force external to the self, has been defined as an internal, versus an external, perceived locus of causality (Deci and Ryan 1985). An internal perceived locus of causality has been found to amplify emotional responses to an event. When individuals ascribe the causes of an event to themselves, they fully endorse its consequences and experience greater positive affect from a desirable outcome but also greater negative affect from an undesirable outcome (Baron and Ritov 1994; Gilovich, Medvec, and Chen 1995; Landman 1987; Spranca, Minsk, and Baron 1991; Weiner 1986). By contrast, individuals have been found to become emotionally withdrawn and maladaptive when they believe outcomes to be independent from their own behavior (Seligman 1975).

The exercise of choice has long been considered a trigger for personal causation (Langer 1975; Zuckerman et al. 1978). When choosing, individuals perceive themselves to be meaningful agents in what they will experience and attribute outcomes to their own actions. In contrast, when outcomes are externally chosen, either by fate or by a third party, individuals perceive their experience as being determined by causal forces beyond their control. Thus, choosing an outcome, versus having the same outcome randomly assigned or chosen by another, generates more intense emotional responses because of the greater sense of personal causality associated with choice.

Research has also shown that task-induced affect, such as the enhanced affective reactions stemming from the act of making a choice, influences consumer evaluations and resulting behaviors (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). For example, it has been shown that the elation of crediting oneself for a desirable result and the sorrow of blaming oneself for an undesirable result transfer into its evaluation. Relative to an externally imposed choice, a personally made choice led to greater liking for the same appealing outcome but also to greater disliking for the same unappealing outcome (Botti and McGill 2006).

Taken together, prior theorizing and findings suggest that the evaluation of an outcome depends not only on its objective worth but also on the manner in which it is obtained, namely, whether it is self-made or externally made. A self-made choice implies greater perceived personal causality and leads to more extreme evaluations for outcomes selected by the self than for outcomes selected by fate or by another. However, the extent to which the act of choosing elicits perceived causality may vary. Moller, Ryan, and Deci (2006) propose that, although the experience of choice presupposes a feeling of engagement with the decision and an endorsement of its consequences, contextual events can influence the degree of self-determination associated with the act of choosing. Similarly, Clee and Wicklund (1980) argue that freedom of choice does not affect individuals’ subsequent judgments and evaluations when decision makers are unable to understand the full implications of exercising each of the available options. Botti and McGill (2006) provided em-
pirical evidence for these arguments by showing that the extent to which participants credited or blamed themselves for a decision outcome depended on the level of diagnosticity of the information about the relative quality of the choice-set alternatives. Choosers’ satisfaction with desirable and undesirable outcomes was not different from that of nonchoosers when the available information did not allow them to meaningfully differentiate among the alternatives.

Hence, personally making a choice, as compared to having the same choice externally determined, causes a differential evaluation for the same outcome only when consumers understand that outcome as being personally caused, emanating from the self, and not from a force external to the self and beyond their control. In the next sections we investigate how differences between hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals could influence the extent to which consumers perceive personal causality.

HEdONIC AND UTILITARIAN CONSUMPTION

Consumer goals, products, and activities are often classified as hedonic or utilitarian, a categorization that summarizes a host of related concepts (for a review, see Khan, Dhar, and Wertenbroch [2005]). For example, hedonic consumption experiences are fun, sensorial, and spontaneous (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Because of their inherent pleasurable, playful, and immediately gratifying nature, hedonic experiences often elicit guilt and are likened to vices and luxuries. Utilitarian consumption experiences, on the other hand, are functional, sensible, and useful. As a result, utilitarian experiences are easy to justify because they are associated with virtues and necessities (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Okada 2005; Sela, Berger, and Liu 2009; Strailevitz and Myers 1998).

Accordingly, hedonic consumption is more affectively rich than utilitarian consumption, such that attitudes and behaviors toward products and activities are more likely to be determined by affective considerations (Pham 1998). Preferences for hedonic tasks and goods are emotionally driven, whereas those for utilitarian tasks and goods are cognitively driven (Havléna and Holbrook 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mano and Oliver 1993; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). The affect-rich nature of hedonic outcomes causes value to be established mostly on internal, subjective, and discretionary standards, whereas the value of utilitarian outcomes depends on external, objective, and mandatory standards (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1990).

More important for our theorizing, however, are the motivational drivers, which are essential in determining whether an experience is perceived as primarily hedonic or utilitarian (Khan et al. 2005; Pham 1998). According to Batra and Ahtola (1990), consumers purchase and consume for two motives: consummatory (hedonic) gratification, mostly derived from innate affective and sensory attributes, and instrumental (utilitarian) reasons concerned with expectations of consequences. Thus, a hedonic experience is intrinsically motivated and inherently rewarding and for this reason is sought as an end in itself, a terminal goal. By contrast, a utilitarian experience is extrinsically motivated because it is not rewarding in itself but is instrumental to the achievement of a higher-level goal (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mano and Oliver 1993; Pham 1998). It is important to note that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to engage in an activity depends not on who compels that activity, whether the self or a third party, but on the reason for pursuing it, whether for its inherent satisfaction or as a means to a separable consequence that might or might not be compelled by the self (Moller et al. 2006). In this respect, tasks that are undertaken not for their own sake but as links to self-selected, longer-term purposes, including the improvement of self-image, are by definition extrinsically motivated (Kasser and Ryan 1996).

Central to our theory development, we refer to intrinsic motivations as terminal and define consumption experiences as hedonic when they are sought as goals in themselves and not as intermediate steps to achieve higher-end goals, including self-signals. Thus, eating for the sheer pleasure of tasting the food is a hedonic experience, whereas eating to cultivate a gourmet self-image is not. We instead refer to extrinsic motivations as instrumental and to consumption experiences as utilitarian when they serve a goal beyond that inherent in the experience itself, for example, eating in order to learn about a foreign culture or to signal a gourmet image to oneself or others.

HEdONIC AND UTILITARIAN CHOICES

Classic research in psychology suggests that terminally motivated activities, such as hedonic choices, have an internal perceived locus of causality because they are entertained for their inherent satisfaction (deCharms 1968; Deci and Ryan 1985). On the contrary, instrumentally motivated activities, such as utilitarian choices, shift the locus of causality from internal to external because the activity is experienced not as a reward in itself but as a means to an end. Instrumentally motivated choices can be perceived as driven by a pressuring external force that decreases people’s sense of free will in that the reason for making that choice is shifted away from the enjoyment of an immediate reward to the selection of a course of action that is functional to the achievement of a higher-level goal (Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett 1973; Ryan, Koestner, and Deci 1991).

A choice from among hedonic, terminal options should therefore be associated with greater perceived causality than a choice from among utilitarian, instrumental options because the presence of a separable, higher-end goal may reduce utilitarian choosers’ sense of self-determination. Supporting this argument, Ryan et al. (1991) asked study participants to perform a social perception task described either as “a test of social intelligence” or as “a kind of game that you might find interesting,” a manipulation that is akin to making a task instrumentally or terminally motivated, respectively. Results
show that participants who engaged in the instrumental task reported a lower amount of perceived choice than those who engaged in the terminal task.

Thus, although choice is naturally linked with personal causality and a lack of choice with the absence of personal causality, the difference in personal causality between choosers and nonchoosers may be influenced by the terminal versus instrumental motivation of, respectively, hedonic and utilitarian choices. A choice feels less like a choice when it is instrumental, rather than terminal. By the same token, however, if the presence of a separable goal reduces the perception of choice as an exercise in self-determination and control, it should also make a lack of choice feel less like a deprivation of the capacity to determine one’s own fate. As a result, we predict that the difference in perceived causality experienced by choosers and nonchoosers should be reduced in the context of instrumentally motivated versus terminally motivated choices.

Building on prior research showing that greater feelings of personal causality make the evaluation of the same decision outcome more extreme (Botti and McGill 2006), we hypothesize that in the context of hedonic, terminal decisions, outcome satisfaction is enhanced when that outcome is self-chosen rather than externally determined. In contrast, in the context of utilitarian, instrumental decisions, the lower level of perceived causality associated with choosing, as compared to not choosing, is likely to make choosers feel more similar to nonchoosers, resulting in a reduced difference in satisfaction between a personally and an externally chosen outcome.

This emphasis on the difference between the terminal and instrumental goals driving hedonic and utilitarian choices is theoretically relevant for two main reasons. First, it distinguishes between the motivational and the valence dimension of the hedonic-utilitarian construct and implies that the same choice options can be perceived as primarily hedonic or utilitarian regardless of their valence. Indeed, some hedonic products might be seen as undesirable depending on one’s tastes (e.g., some artistic creations), while many utilitarian products may be seen as desirable (e.g., a therapeutic massage), indicating that the hedonic and utilitarian concepts are not perfectly aligned with valence. Second, this distinction contributes to prior research showing an effect of choice-set valence on choosers and nonchoosers’ satisfaction (Botti and Iyengar 2004) by predicting that, controlling for the level of desirability of the options, a choice will always induce greater satisfaction in choosers relative to nonchoosers when it is hedonic and a smaller difference in satisfaction when it is utilitarian.

We investigate the hypothesized relationship between choice, goal, and satisfaction in four studies. Following prior research (Pham 1998), in each study the consumption goal was manipulated by keeping the choice-set options the same across the hedonic and utilitarian experimental conditions and varying the terminal versus instrumental motivation of the choice task. Because the hedonic versus utilitarian categorization is tied to a host of related concepts as described previously, the studies were designed to test our perceived causality explanation and to rule out rival accounts.

**STUDY 1—MUSEUM STUDY**

**Method**

The experiment employed a 2 (choice: choice vs. no choice) × 2 (goal: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subjects design. One hundred forty-two students at the University of Chicago were paid $5.00 each to participate in this 20-minute study.

Upon entering the laboratory, participants were seated in a booth in front of a computer and told to follow the instructions that would appear on the screen. Participants in the hedonic condition read the bracketed version of the following instructions, whereas those in the utilitarian condition read the parenthetical version:

A moderately large U.S. city is planning to open a new photography museum. The curators are testing different formats. You have been selected for the test. The curators have asked you to imagine [being a tourist] (being an art student) visiting the museum [just for fun] (to collect material for your bachelor’s thesis). You will be presented with some options about how to structure a virtual museum visit.

Participants in the choice hedonic (utilitarian) condition next read:

You can choose one of the options keeping in mind that your goal is to maximize the fun of the visit (your learning during the visit).

In contrast, participants in the no choice hedonic (utilitarian) condition next read:

The curators have already chosen one of the options, keeping in mind that their goal is to maximize your fun during the visit (your learning during the visit).

All participants were then shown three options about alternative ways in which the museum collection could be categorized, specifically: (1) country of origin of the photographers, (2) decade in which the photographs were taken, and (3) theme of the photographs. Although all participants saw the same information, those in the choice condition were free to select the alternative they preferred by clicking on it, whereas those in the no choice condition could click only on the alternative that the curators had allegedly chosen on their behalf, which was highlighted on the screen.

Participants were then shown three subcategories of the selected categorization criterion and informed that the photographs for each subcategory would be arranged in one room. The subcategories for the country of origin criterion were USA, Europe, and South America; those for the decade criterion were 1970–80, 1980–90, and 1990–2000; those for the theme criterion were Body and Soul, Life of the Mind, and Reflections. Participants were told that three virtual rooms would be visited in a specific order. Again, whereas choosers were free to choose the order, nonchoosers could
Next, participants experienced the virtual visit. They were told that they would see three sets of four photographs each that were grouped according to the selected categorization criterion and arranged in three subsequent rooms based on the selected subcategory order. For example, if the selected criterion was theme of the photographs and the order Reflections first and Life of the Mind third, the participant would see first the virtual room containing the four photographs grouped under the subcategory Reflections, then the virtual room containing the four Body and Soul photographs, and, finally, the virtual room with the Life of the Mind photographs. In line with prior research (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Zuckerman et al. 1978), participants in the no choice condition were yoked to those in the choice condition, such that each nonchooser was assigned to the same choices made by a chooser counterpart. In reality, however, the choice was illusory for all participants, because the low level of detail of the information provided about the different categorization and order criteria allowed us to show the same photographs in the same order and to control for the decision outcome across all experimental conditions. After the virtual visit, which was completed at their own pace, participants indicated their satisfaction with the outcome by answering the question “How much did you like the visit to the museum?” on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = extremely).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (choice: choice vs. no choice) × 2 (goal: hedonic vs. utilitarian) ANOVA conducted on participants’ liking of the visit yielded the expected interaction ($F(1, 139) = 6.48$, $p < .05$), whereas both the main effects for choice ($F(1, 139) = 2.15$, NS) and goal ($F(1, 139) < 1$, NS) were not significant. Subsequent contrast analyses revealed the predicted pattern of results. In the hedonic condition, choice participants ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.14$) liked the same visit more than no choice participants ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.98$; $F(1, 139) = 8.22$, $p < .005$). In contrast, in the utilitarian condition, the difference between the satisfaction of choosers and nonchoosers was not significant ($M_{\text{choice}} = 4.97$, $SD = 1.25$; $M_{\text{no choice}} = 5.17$, $SD = 1.04$; $F(1, 139) < 1$, NS).

These results (illustrated in fig. 1) show that the enhancing effect of choice, relative to no choice, on satisfaction with the same experience differs according to the goal of the decision task. Choice enhanced the extent to which participants liked the museum visit when their decisions were led by the hedonic goal of having fun. However, when participants were driven by the utilitarian goal of writing a thesis, they liked the personally chosen museum visit only as much as the curator-chosen one.

We attribute these results to differences in the participants’ perceived personal causality. Because hedonic choices are terminally motivated and associated with an internal locus of causality, choosers were more likely to feel as if their experience had originated from the self, and nonchoosers were more likely to feel as if they were deprived of self-determination, leading to greater difference in satisfaction for the same museum visit. In contrast, because utilitarian outcomes are instrumentally motivated, the related external locus of causality may have made choosers and nonchoosers more similar in the extent to which they felt outcomes to be contingent on their actions. As a result, there was no difference between the satisfaction of utilitarian participants who chose by themselves and the satisfaction of those who had the same choice externally imposed.

Although these results were in line with our expectations, there are potential alternative explanations that need to be considered. First, in study 1 the no choice condition involved an expert making the choice on behalf of the consumer. The mitigation in satisfaction observed in the utilitarian condition could then be explained with participants’ belief that the curator was at least as qualified as they were in selecting the most pedagogically effective alternative. To ensure that our results are tied to personal causation and not to expertise, we conducted study 2, in which the no choice condition reflected random selection. As consumers should clearly be more expert than a random-selection mechanism in both hedonic and utilitarian contexts, the expertise explanation would predict just a main effect of choice on satisfaction. In contrast, our perceived-causality explanation is based on the extent to which the locus of causality is believed to be internal, dependent on the self, rather than external, dependent on forces beyond the control of the self, without distinguishing whether these forces act at random or express an expert’s judgment. Thus, we would predict an interactive effect of choice and goal on satisfaction even when the no choice is determined at random.

A second potential alternative explanation for the results of study 1 may come from differences in the enjoyment of
the choice process. One may contend that the act of choosing is more pleasurable in a hedonic context than in a utilitarian context because the former involves more inherently rewarding alternatives and that this difference could translate into the observed variations in satisfaction. A similar effect was recently shown by Choi and Fishbach (2010), who demonstrated that framing a choice as a way to express one’s taste versus getting something one needs changes the desirability of the decision process and of the subsequent outcome.

To check for this alternative account, in study 2 we asked participants to evaluate their liking not only of the decision outcome but also of the decision process. The process explanation would predict an interaction such that choosers in the hedonic condition would like the choice process more than those in the utilitarian condition and a mediating effect of this interaction. Our explanation, in contrast, does not hypothesize that consumers’ satisfaction with the process has a role in determining satisfaction with the outcome. Rather, it is the greater perceived causality associated with hedonic goals that enhances the difference between choosers and non-choosers’ outcome satisfactions. Finally, the measure of satisfaction used in study 2 is more comprehensive than the one-item score employed in study 1.

**STUDY 2—MASSAGE STUDY**

**Method**

One hundred nineteen undergraduate students from Cornell University participated in this 10-minute study for extra credit. Participants were asked to read a scenario and answer the questionnaire that followed. Participants in the hedonic condition read the following scenario:

> Imagine that you have been working really hard during the semester and achieved important academic successes. You think that a professional massage at a local spa renowned for the quality of their massage treatments would represent a great way to reward yourself.

Participants in the utilitarian condition read instead the following scenario:

> Imagine that you have been suffering mild back pains and a general soreness. Your doctor tells you that these are just symptoms of overall body fatigue and recommends a professional massage at a local spa renowned for the quality of their massage treatments.

Both sets of participants were then told that the spa offered four types of massages, which were illustrated by a name and a brief description (see appendix A). Finally, participants were asked to imagine having a gift certificate to spend at the spa. In the choice condition this certificate allowed them to select any of the four massages, whereas in the no choice condition the certificate happened to be valid for only one of the massages. As in study 1, a yoke design was used such that each nonchooser was assigned to the same massage as a chooser counterpart.

After reading the scenario, participants answered a questionnaire measuring their anticipated satisfaction with the decision outcome and their satisfaction with the decision process. Anticipated satisfaction with the outcome was assessed by asking them to rate on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all; 9 = extremely) how much they thought they would like and enjoy the massage, how satisfied they thought they would be with the massage, how confident they were that they would have liked the massage, and how good they thought they would feel about the massage experience. Satisfaction with the process was assessed by asking participants their liking for their choice condition on the same 9-point scale (“How much do you think that you would like choosing which massage to get?” in the choice condition and “How much do you think that you would like not choosing which massage to get?” in the no choice condition).

**Results**

**Anticipated Satisfaction with the Decision Outcome.** To measure anticipated satisfaction with the decision outcome, we combined participants’ answers about predicted liking, enjoyment, satisfaction, confidence, and feelings into an overall anticipated satisfaction measure ($\alpha = .89$). The 2 (choice: choice vs. no choice) $\times$ 2 (goal: hedonic vs. utilitarian) ANOVA conducted on this combined measure yielded a main effect for choice ($F(1, 115) = 4.88, p < .05$) and a choice $\times$ goal interaction ($F(1, 115) = 6.62, p < .05$), whereas the main effect for goal was marginal ($F(1, 115) = 3.71, p = .06$). Choosers anticipated being more satisfied than nonchoosers did ($M_{\text{choice}} = 7.65, SD = 0.81$; $M_{\text{no choice}} = 7.26, SD = 1.06$), and participants in the hedonic condition anticipated being marginally more satisfied than those in the utilitarian condition did ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 7.57, SD = 0.99$; $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 7.29, SD = 0.93$). Contrast analyses performed on the interaction revealed the expected significant difference between participants in the choice and no choice conditions when the goal was hedonic ($M_{\text{choice}} = 8.02, SD = 0.68$; $M_{\text{no choice}} = 7.21, SD = 1.07$; $F(1, 115) = 11.92, p < .001$) but not when the goal was utilitarian ($M_{\text{choice}} = 7.25, SD = 0.76$; $M_{\text{no choice}} = 7.32, SD = 1.06$; $F(1, 115) < 1$, NS; see fig. 2).

**Satisfaction with the Decision Process.** The 2 (choice) $\times$ 2 (goal) ANOVA on participants’ liking of their own condition revealed a main effect for choice ($F(1, 115) = 135.90, p < .0001$) and a main effect for goal ($F(1, 115) = 7.45, p < .01$) but no significant interaction between the two ($F(1, 115) < 1$, NS). Participants liked their decision process more in the choice ($M = 7.67, SD = 1.65$) and hedonic ($M = 5.97, SD = 2.65$) conditions than those in the no choice ($M = 3.75, SD = 2.04$) and utilitarian ($M = 5.05, SD = 2.70$) conditions did.

**Discussion**

Results of study 2 replicated those of study 1. As expected, in the hedonic condition the anticipated satisfaction of participants who could autonomously choose an option
was greater than that of participants who were randomly assigned the same option through a coupon. In the utilitarian condition, however, participants’ anticipated satisfaction was the same regardless of whether the choice was self-made or randomly imposed. These results are consistent with our explanation based on perceived personal causality but do not support two potential alternative accounts.

One alternative account, the expertise explanation, is tied to the nature of the no choice condition. In study 1, an expert made the choice for the participants, raising the possibility that our observed pattern of effects might reflect differences in expectations regarding the value of experts. People might believe that experts are not very useful for predicting personal likes for hedonic outcomes but quite effective in predicting positive assessments of utilitarian outcomes. In study 2, however, the no choice outcome was determined at random, but we still observed the interaction of choice and goal ruling out an expertise-based explanation.

The second rival account, the process explanation, posits that choosers in study 1 liked the choice process more than nonchoosers did when the choice was hedonic, but not when it was utilitarian, and that this greater liking of the process transferred into outcome evaluation. Study 2 results demonstrated that hedonic decision making was indeed liked more than utilitarian decision making but that participants overall liked choosing more than not choosing regardless of whether the choice-making task was hedonic or utilitarian. This lack of a significant interaction undermines the process explanation: participants in this study reported liking the possibility of choosing for themselves, but this pleasure did not always lead to a more positive evaluation of the outcomes.

Although the results from the previous two studies rule out two potential alternative explanations, we have yet to provide empirical evidence for our proposed psychological mechanism. The main objective of the next study is to obtain direct evidence that the difference in satisfaction among choosers and nonchoosers across the hedonic and utilitarian goal conditions hinges on different levels of perceived personal causality for the outcome. We do so by directly measuring the extent to which participants felt the consequences of their choices to be self-determined versus decided by forces external to the self and using this measure as a mediator of the relationship between hedonic and utilitarian choices, on one side, and satisfaction, on the other.

Study 3 also considered an additional alternative explanation based on ease of assessment. Given that the value of affect-driven hedonic choices is subjectively established, whereas the value of cognitive-driven utilitarian choices is more objective (Babin et al. 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1990), it could be easier for hedonic participants than for utilitarian participants to assess the decision outcomes. In this study we therefore measured participants’ assessment ability by directly asking how easy it was for them to assess the decision outcome.

Finally, in study 3 we used a modified version of the overall anticipated satisfaction score employed in study 2. A potential limitation of this score is that it included affect-based evaluation items, such as enjoyment and pleasurable feelings, which are more appropriate for hedonic targets, together with cognition-based evaluation items, such as satisfaction and liking, which are more appropriate for utilitarian targets. In the next study we avoid the affect-based items to assess participants’ outcome evaluation, and we use instead a greater number of cognition-based items in addition to the satisfaction and liking measures.

### STUDY 3—GOURMET FOOD STUDY

#### Method

One hundred five students at different universities in London were compensated £10 each to come to the London Business School laboratory and take part in this 15-minute study. The scenario presented to participants asked them to imagine eating gourmet food in Italy to achieve either a hedonic or a utilitarian goal. Participants read that a famous chef had opened a culinary school specializing in innovative vegetarian cuisine and that the students’ creations were served in the adjacent restaurant. In the hedonic condition participants read the following:

You really like food and you consider eating as one of the most pleasurable activities in life. You believe that having a good meal is an enjoyable, inherently motivated, and self-rewarding way to spend time. Although you know nothing about this regional Italian cuisine, you decide to go to this restaurant.

In the utilitarian condition, participants were told that they were working as consultants for an international client and that as part of this job they had to learn practical differences among cultures. They also read the following:
The partner on the project has mentioned that food is an important cultural element and that eating is an activity that allows a better understanding of traditions and habits. Based on these comments, you believe that having a meal in this restaurant will help you achieve the objective of learning more about a foreign culture. Thus, although you know nothing about this regional Italian cuisine, you decide to go.

Next, participants imagined being presented with a menu including brief descriptions of four main courses (see Appendix B). Choosers were then told that they could select any one of the main courses and were asked to indicate which one they would have liked to eat. Nonchoosers were notified of the main course they would have eaten after being informed that “to ensure a comprehensive students’ training,” the diners at the culinary school were randomly assigned to one of the four main courses. As before, a yoked design was used to determine the dish assignment in the no choice condition.

After reading the scenario and making or acknowledging their chosen main course, participants answered a questionnaire. To measure overall anticipated satisfaction with the decision outcome, we asked the same two questions about liking and satisfaction with the outcome that we asked in study 2; in addition, however, participants rated on 9-point scales how they would evaluate the main course on two additional items: not beneficial to me/beneficial to me and overall negative experience/overall positive experience.

Next, to test our proposed personal causality explanation, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with five statements on 9-point scales (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree). These statements directly follow from the definition of perceived personal causality as the feeling that an outcome has emanated from the self rather than from a force external to the self (deCharms 1968), leading to the full endorsement of one’s own actions and decisions (Moller et al. 2006): “I feel as if I own this choice of main course,” “This choice of main course is an expression of my self-determination,” “I feel that this choice of main course was controlled by forces external to my own will” (reverse scored), “I feel that I endorse this choice of main course,” and “I feel truly engaged in this choice of main course.”

Finally, we asked one question to directly measure the ability of participants to assess the consequences of their choices: “How easy do you think it would be for you to assess whether the main course did what you wanted?”

Results

Anticipated Satisfaction with the Decision Outcome. A 2 × 2 (choice: choice vs. no choice) × 2 (goal: hedonic vs. utilitarian) ANOVA conducted on the combined four-item overall anticipated satisfaction measure (α = .88) revealed a main effect for choice (F(1, 101) = 6.43, p < .05), such that choosers’ predicted satisfaction (M = 6.60, SD = 1.49) was greater than that of nonchoosers’ satisfaction (M = 5.83, SD = 1.55) but no main effect for goal (F(1, 101) = 1.64, NS).

A significant choice × goal interaction (F(1, 101) = 4.30, p < .05) qualified this main effect (see fig. 3). Subsequent contrast analyses revealed the familiar pattern: in the hedonic condition, choosers’ anticipated satisfaction was greater than that of nonchoosers (Mchoice = 7.08, SD = 0.88; Mnochoice = 5.73, SD = 1.71; F(1, 101) = 11.57, p < .001), but in the utilitarian condition this difference in satisfaction was not significant (Mchoice = 6.09, SD = 1.83; Mnochoice = 5.96, SD = 1.34; F(1, 101) < 1, NS).

Personal Causality. A 2 (choice) × 2 (goal) ANOVA conducted on the five-item overall personal causality measure (α = .82) yielded a main effect for choice (F(1, 101) = 70.76, p < .0001) but no main effect for goal (F(1, 101) < 1, NS). Choosers overall felt more personal causality than nonchoosers did (Mchoice = 5.61, SD = 1.31; Mnochoice = 3.40, SD = 1.36). Once again, a significant choice × goal interaction (F(1, 101) = 4.41, p < .05), showed that this difference in personal causality varied across goal conditions, as it was greater in the hedonic (Mchoice = 5.98, SD = 1.08; Mnochoice = 3.26, SD = 1.46; F(1, 101) = 60.17, p < .0001) than in the utilitarian condition (Mchoice = 5.21, SD = 1.43; Mnochoice = 3.57, SD = 1.23; F(1, 101) = 18.41, p < .0001).

Supporting our explanation, this feeling of perceived personal causality mediated anticipated satisfaction with the decision outcome. Following the Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure, we first Regression personal causality on choice, goal, and their interaction, and found that the coefficients for choice (B = 1.63, SE = 0.38; t(1, 101) = 4.29, p < .0001) and for the choice × goal interaction (B = 1.09, SE = 0.52; t(1, 101) = 2.10, p < .05) were significant.

FIGURE 3

STUDY 3—INTERACTION BETWEEN CHOICE AND GOAL ON ANTICIPATED SATISFACTION WITH THE GOURMET MAIN COURSE
Second, we checked that the regression of anticipated satisfaction on feelings of personal causality was also significant ($B = 0.43, SE = 0.08; t(1, 103) = 5.59, p < .0001$). Finally, when we regressed anticipated satisfaction on choice, goal, the choice × goal interaction, and personal causality, the coefficient for personal causality remained significant ($B = 0.46, SE = 0.10; t(1, 100) = 4.41, p < .0001$), whereas that for the choice × goal interaction, which was significant before the inclusion of personal causality in the regression ($B = 1.22, SE = 0.59; t(1, 101) = 2.07, p < .05$), was not significant ($B = 0.72, SE = 0.55; t(1, 100) = 1.31, NS; z = 1.94, SE = 0.26, p = .05$).

Ease of Assessment. The 2 (choice) × 2 (goal) ANOVA on the ease-of-assessment question revealed significant main effects for choice ($F(1, 101) = 6.41, p < .05$) and goal ($F(1, 101) = 9.14, p < .005$). Choosers ($M = 6.58, SD = 1.95$) and participants in the hedonic condition ($M = 6.63, SD = 1.78$) reported greater ease of assessment than did nonchoosers ($M = 5.69, SD = 2.10$) and participants in the utilitarian condition ($M = 5.50, SD = 2.23$). The choice × goal interaction was not significant ($F(1, 101) < 1, NS$).

Discussion

Study 3 replicated the results of the previous two studies and lent empirical support to our thesis that satisfaction with a self-made versus an externally made choice depends on the level of personal causality associated with hedonic and utilitarian goals. Although, in keeping with prior literature (deCharms 1968; Deci and Ryan 1985; Langer 1975; Zuckerman et al. 1978), participants experienced greater feelings of personal causality as choosers than as nonchoosers, this difference was larger in the case of hedonic, terminally motivated choices than in the case of utilitarian, instrumentally motivated choices. In addition, these variations in the level of perceived personal causality mediated the results for anticipated satisfaction. Hence, relative to nonchoosers, choosers’ stronger sense of self-determination with hedonic experiences explains their greater anticipated satisfaction; on the contrary, choosers’ increased perception of an external force driving their utilitarian experiences reduced their differential anticipated satisfaction to the point of not being statistically significant.

Further, results of study 3 controlled for a potential alternative explanation, ease of assessment, according to which choice causes greater anticipated satisfaction than no choice when it is hedonic as compared to utilitarian because hedonic outcomes are easier to self-assess. A direct measure of self-assessment showed that chosen outcomes were easier to assess than nonchosen outcomes and that hedonic outcomes were easier to assess than utilitarian outcomes, but these two main effects could not account for the observed interaction between choice and goal on anticipated satisfaction.

Yet, there may be another rival explanation for our findings. Prior research has found that the positive effect of choice on outcome satisfaction depends on the valence of the choice-set options such that desirable options make choosers more satisfied than nonchoosers but that aversive options make them less satisfied (Botti and Iyengar 2004). If one assumes that hedonic options are generally more desirable (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) while utilitarian options, although not aversive, are generally less desirable, our results might be explained by this prior research.

The present work aims at teasing apart these two potentially overlapping dimensions of the hedonic-utilitarian construct, valence and motivation (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Pham 1998). One way of doing so is to question the assumption that these two constructs do indeed overlap. Whereas hedonic options can be characterized as desirable because they have a terminal motivation, the instrumental motivation driving utilitarian options does not conceptually correspond to their being low in desirability.

Study 3 represented a first step in this direction because the choice-set options (gourmet dishes) were all desirable. The focus on valence advocated by prior research would predict choosers’ anticipated satisfaction with the selected main course to be greater than that of nonchoosers in both the hedonic and utilitarian conditions, a main effect. In contrast, the focus on motivation proposed in this article would predict choosers to anticipate greater satisfaction only in the hedonic, but not in the utilitarian, condition, an interaction consistent with study 3 results.

A second approach, and the main objective of study 4, is to strengthen the empirical evidence supporting this valence-motivation distinction. Thus, in study 4 participants were exposed to a selection of terminally or instrumentally motivated options that were relatively less desirable than those employed in the previous studies. The valence-based account would predict choosing to be less satisfying than not choosing in this less desirable context. However, in this article we posit that it is not the more versus less desirable valence of the choice-set options that will drive participants’ outcome satisfaction but the terminal versus instrumental motivation of, respectively, hedonic and utilitarian consumption experiences, after controlling for the option valence. As a result, we expect that even in the case of less desirable choice-set options, choosers will anticipate greater satisfaction than nonchoosers will when making a hedonic choice but not when making a utilitarian choice.

Clearly, it is challenging to create choice options that are concurrently terminal, serving no higher-level goal, while still being low in desirability. Work-related tasks may be an example, because most of us would agree that working is a necessary but not particularly pleasant dimension of our lives and yet, as in the words of deCharms (1968, 273), “if one can choose his work without regard to external pressures and necessity, it takes on many of the aspects of play.” In study 4 we employed a different type of less desirable choice option, exorcizing physical exercises described as having the explicit intent to make trainees experience discomfort. People usually submit themselves to challenging physical activities when they strive to lose weight or keep in shape,
an instrumental goal. Nonetheless, the widespread participation in extreme sporting events such as the Ironman Triathlon competition (2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike run, and 26.2-mile marathon run) attended by thousands of amateur athletes, suggests that it is not unreasonable for some physical activities to be pursued for their own (un)desirability, for the sake of the excitement derived from pushing oneself beyond one’s limits. In some cases, people seem to take direct pleasure from unpleasant experiences, and this unusual category serves as the basis for our operationalization of less desirable hedonic alternatives.

**STUDY 4—TRAINING-CAMP STUDY**

**Method**

Eighty-eight students at different universities in London were each paid a £5 voucher to participate in this 10-minute online study. As in the previous experiment, participants read a scenario in which they were asked to imagine experiencing the same activity for either a hedonic or a utilitarian goal. In this case, however, the valence of the activity was less desirable, that is, it consisted of strenuous physical exercise. Participants in the hedonic goal condition read the following:

> Imagine that you have always enjoyed exercising. Exercising is an inherently motivated and self-rewarding activity for you as it is pleasurable and exciting. Although you exercise regularly, your training sessions are not as intense as they used to be.

In the utilitarian condition, participants read instead the following:

> Imagine that you have decided to take off some extra weight that you have put on recently. You are confident that the weight increase is mostly due to the fact that, although you exercise regularly, your training sessions are not as intense as they used to be.

Participants were then asked to imagine that the staff at their gym organized a training camp to be held during the weekend that would be “excruciatingly hard, as it is meant to push participants beyond what normally feels good for them.” Participants then read the descriptions of four “different, but equally challenging, training programs” (see appendix C for the list of programs) before being told either that they were allowed to choose one of these programs (choice condition) or that they would be randomly assigned to one program “to simplify the organization of the training camp” (no choice condition). As in the previous studies, a yoke design was used to ensure that pairs of participants in the choice and no choice conditions were assigned to the same program.

After making their choice, or having acknowledged the choice they had been randomly assigned to, participants answered the same questions for anticipated satisfaction and personal causality used in the previous study.

**Results**

**Anticipated Satisfaction with the Decision Outcome.** The 2 (choice: choice vs. no choice) x 2 (goal: hedonic vs. utilitarian) ANOVA conducted on the four-item overall anticipated satisfaction measure (α = .89) yielded a main effect for choice (F(1, 83) = 4.61, p < .05) and a significant choice x goal interaction (F(1, 83) = 5.46, p < .05) but no main effect for goal (F(1, 83) < 1, NS).

Choosers’ predicted satisfaction (M = 6.41, SD = 1.60) was greater than that of nonchoosers (M = 5.78, SD = 1.52). As illustrated in figure 4, contrast analyses on the interaction revealed that, once again, this difference was significant only when the goal was hedonic but not when the goal was utilitarian. When the goal was hedonic, participants who made their choice anticipated greater satisfaction with the decision outcome than did participants who had a choice randomly assigned to them (Mchoice = 6.95, SD = 1.10; Mno choice = 5.47, SD = 1.75; F(1, 83) = 9.11, p < .005). In contrast, when the goal was utilitarian, choosers’ anticipated satisfaction was only as high as that of nonchoosers (Mchoice = 5.97, SD = 1.83; Mno choice = 6.03, SD = 1.29; F(1, 83) < 1, NS).

**Personal Causality.** A 2 (choice) x 2 (goal) ANOVA on the overall five-item personal causality measure (α = .84) yielded a main effect for choice (F(1, 82) = 50.83, p < .0001), whereas the main effect for goal was not significant (F(1, 82) < 1, NS). This main effect was qualified by a choice x goal interaction (F(1, 82) = 4.05, p < .05). Although choosers reported, as expected, greater feelings of personal causality than nonchoosers did (Mchoice = 6.41, SD = 1.30; Mno choice = 4.33, SD = 1.53), this difference was larger for those in the hedonic condition (Mchoice = 6.59, SD = 1.27; Mno choice = 3.82, SD = 1.41; F(1, 82) = 37.43, p < .0001) than for those in the utilitarian condition.

**FIGURE 4**

**STUDY 4—INTERACTION BETWEEN CHOICE AND GOAL ON ANTICIPATED SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING-CAMP PROGRAM**
As in the previous study, a mediation analysis was conducted to establish the role of personal causality in the relationship between choice, goal, and anticipated outcome satisfaction (Baron and Kenny 1986). The first regression confirmed that the personal-causality score was significantly predicted by choice ($B = 1.55$, $SE = 0.40$; $t(1, 82) = 3.85, p < .0005$), goal ($B = -0.90$, $SE = 0.43$; $t(1, 82) = -2.11, p < .05$), and their interaction ($B = 1.22$, $SE = 0.61$; $t(1, 82) = 2.01, p < .05$). The second regression confirmed that anticipated satisfaction was significantly predicted by personal causality ($B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.08$; $t(1, 83) = 6.32, p < .0001$). The third regression, with anticipated satisfaction as the dependent variable and choice, goal, choice × goal, and personal causality as independent variables, revealed that the choice × goal interaction, which was significant before the inclusion of the personal-causality score ($B = 1.54$, $SE = 0.66$; $t(1, 83) = 2.34, p < .05$), became not significant after the inclusion ($B = 0.80$, $SE = 0.58$; $t(1, 80) = 1.39, NS$; $z = 1.93, SE = 0.39, p = .05$), whereas the personal-causality score remained significant ($B = 0.62$, $SE = 0.10$; $t(1, 80) = 6.06, p < .0001$).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Four studies showed that the satisfaction of choosers who autonomously selected an outcome was greater than that of nonchoosers who were assigned the same outcome—one either by an expert (study 1) or at random (studies 2, 3, and 4)—when the goal of the choice task was hedonic but not when it was utilitarian. We explain these differences by hypothesizing and empirically testing that in hedonic, terminally motivated choices as compared to utilitarian, instrumentally motivated choices, the exercise of choice triggers a greater sense of personal causality, and the lack of choice is perceived more as an absence of self-determination.

The hedonic-utilitarian construct summarizes a number of related concepts (Khan et al. 2005). In this article, we focused on terminal versus instrumental motivation and controlled for other interrelated notions. First, the choice process may be inherently more pleasurable in the hedonic than in the utilitarian condition (Pham 1998), yet we found no evidence for an interaction between choice and goal on the measure of satisfaction with the decision process collected in study 2. Second, hedonic choices may be easier to assess than utilitarian choices (Babin et al. 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1990); however, the ease-of-assessment measure collected in study 3 did not track the interactive pattern of choice and goal observed on our dependent measure. Finally, because hedonic experiences usually involve more desirable products than utilitarian experiences do (Holbrook and Hirschmann 1982), the effect on satisfaction could be explained by the valence of the choice-set options (Botti and Iyengar 2004) rather than by the choice motivation. Studies 3 and 4 showed, however, that the same interactive pattern could be observed both when the valence was more desirable (gourmet food) and when it was less desirable (excruciating exercise regimens).

Note that, consistent with this prior research on choice valence, studies 3 and 4 controlled for the objective desirability of the choice-set options to support our theory based on differences in personal causality triggered by the hedonic and utilitarian goals. But what if these goals changed the subjective desirability of the options? The possibility that objects are evaluated in light of active goals has been suggested by Markman and Brendl (2000), who described two field studies showing that the value of a lottery ticket depended on the goal that was active at the time of the evaluation. For example, in one study students approached at a university bursar’s office would pay more for the chance of winning a $1,000 waiver on their bursar bill than for the chance of winning $1,000 in cash, whereas the reverse was true for students approached in a campus cafeteria. If the goal manipulation employed in this article also changed the perceived valence of the choice options, our findings might be explained by option valence instead of perceived causality, although in this case the valence would be subjective rather than objective.

To check whether the desirability of the options used in studies 3 and 4 was influenced by consumption goals, we followed up each of these two studies with a posttest. In each posttest we manipulated only one factor, goal, with three conditions, hedonic, utilitarian, and neutral. The goal factor was manipulated with the same gourmet restaurant or training-camp scenarios used in studies 3 and 4, except for the neutral goal conditions in which these scenarios did not illustrate any specific consumption goal. The desirability of the choice options described in the scenarios was measured by combining three questions, the first asking participants to rate on a 9-point scale the options’ overall desirability ($1 =$ not at all; $9 =$ extremely) and the other two asking them to rate on two 9-point scales their agreement with the statements that all the options were appealing and pleasant ($1 =$ completely disagree; $9 =$ completely agree). In contrast with the prediction of the subjective valence explanation, results of these posttests showed no effect of goal on option desirability. Specifically, in the gourmet food posttest the means for the combined options desirability score ($\alpha = .89$) were $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.11$, $SD = 2.18$; $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.93$, $SD = 1.76$; $M_{\text{neutral}} = 5.56$, $SD = 2.01$; ($F(2, 57) < 1$, $\text{NS}$), whereas in the training-camp posttest the means were $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.33$, $SD = 2.16$; $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.98$, $SD = 1.48$; $M_{\text{neutral}} = 5.03$, $SD = 2.10$; ($F(2, 57) < 1$, $\text{NS}$). Our results complement recent research demonstrating that choosing from a larger versus a smaller choice set increases consumers’ likelihood of selecting utilitarian over hedonic options because utilitarian options provide decision makers with compelling reasons to justify a more complex decision (Sela et al. 2009). Although these findings relate to option choice rather than to satisfaction with the chosen option, one could argue that they seem to contradict ours. Because choosing involves more complexity than not choosing does, according to Sela and colleagues, the more jus-
tifiable utilitarian options should lead to greater satisfaction when self-chosen than when externally determined; in contrast, we showed no difference between choice and no choice in the utilitarian condition. This contradiction is, however, based on the assumption that a decision-making context comparing choosing with not choosing simply represents the extreme case of a context comparing choosing from more versus fewer options. Yet, we contend that the main factor that psychologically differentiates choosing from not choosing is not the degree of complexity of the choice task but the extent to which these two processes express personal causality. Arguably, whereas in our studies nonchoosers switched the perceived locus of causality from internal to external, in the studies of Sela and colleagues, even participants confronted with small choice sets experienced personal causation.

Our results may also appear to be at odds with research findings showing that people look for ways to justify their hedonic choices because these choices often entail a sense of guilt (Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Okada 2005; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). It could be argued that individuals may not necessarily want to perceive themselves as causal agents for hedonic choices because they do not want to bear the associated guilt (Khan et al. 2005). However, with the possible exception of study 3 (which involved gourmet food), the hedonic choices used in our studies were either hardly guilt inducing (visiting a museum, exercising) or were already justified (having a massage as a reward for hard work). In addition, we did not measure participants’ willingness to be choosers in hedonic versus utilitarian decision contexts but instead measured participants’ evaluation of a hedonic or utilitarian decision outcome as a function of their having chosen that outcome or not. As results from study 2 showed, satisfaction with the act of choosing or not choosing is not necessarily correlated with outcome satisfaction.

Some of our results may inspire additional future research. The pattern of the choice × goal interaction on satisfaction obtained in study 1 differs from the patterns observed in the other three studies in that it showed a significant difference between nonchoosers (Mhedonic = 4.57, SD = 0.98; Mutilitarian = 5.17, SD = 1.04; F(1, 139) = 5.13, p < .05) instead of between choosers (Mhedonic = 5.32, SD = 1.14; Mutilitarian = 4.97, SD = 1.25; F(1, 139) = 1.76, NS). Interestingly, study 1 was also the only study in which the no choice condition was not randomly determined but selected by an expert. This raises the question of whether the same externally determined choice can have different effects on perception of personal causality and subsequent satisfaction depending on the characteristics of the external chooser. Our results support prior literature in suggesting that a lack of personal choice generates lower perceived causality regardless of the source of the externally made choice because the locus of causality is shifted from internal to external (deCharms 1968; Deci and Ryan 1985). Nevertheless, it is possible that consumers perceive a choice made by an expert to be determined by external forces to a lower degree than a choice made at random. The difference between an external and an internal locus of causality may be more nuanced than a simple dichotomous distinction, with choice being more clearly associated with an internal locus, random no choice with an external locus, and expert no choice somewhere in the middle.

From a theoretical perspective, our personal-causality explanation implies that the evaluation of an outcome depends not only on its utility but also on the utility of the decision process that led to that outcome. In this respect this article is related to work by Thaler (1999) and Higgins and his colleagues (Avnet and Higgins 2003, 2006; Higgins et al. 2003). According to Thaler, the utility derived from a purchase consists in both acquisition utility (“the value the consumer would place on receiving the good as a gift, minus the price paid”; 1999, 188) and transaction utility (“the perceived value of the ‘deal’”; 189). Higgins and colleagues propose instead the concept of value from fit, “a decision value that is derived not from the overall hedonic experience of a decision, but from the strategic manner in which a decision was made” (Avnet and Higgins 2003, 525) and specifically from the perceived fit between decision means and goal orientations (Avnet and Higgins 2006). Both Thaler and Higgins maintain, as we do, that the decision experience informs the value of the decision outcome above and beyond its objective worth. The difference consists in the nature of this decision experience: fairness for Thaler, a sense of “being right” for Higgins, and perceived personal causality for us.

From a managerial perspective, our findings provide actionable insights for marketers who may be considering the provision of free choice for consumers. Companies that offer their customers the opportunity to exercise choice incur greater costs (Berger, Dragnaska, and Simonson 2007) but assume that these greater costs would be offset by the advantages of having more satisfied customers. We suggest that this may not be the case for providers of products and services that are generally consumed in more utilitarian, rather than hedonic, contexts—such as airlines or restaurants that cater to business customers and retailers offering goods that are generally regarded as instrumental or as necessities. In these contexts, rather than being dissatisfied by the lack of choice, consumers may actually end up—heaven forfend!—just as happy.

APPENDIX A

STUDY 2—MASSAGE CHOICE SET

Swedish Massage
A traditional European massage focusing on circulation, soreness, and relaxation. This may be combined with deep tissue massage when more pressure is needed.

Deep Tissue Massage
Using a variety of techniques, our therapists create a highly therapeutic massage incorporating deep pressure to ease muscle soreness and tension, and rejuvenate the body.
Five Elements Massage
It combines massage with heat packs, healing essential oils, and herb salves to increase flexibility, decrease muscular tension, and detoxify the body.

Reflexology Massage
The ancient oriental practice of pressure-point massage concentrates on the nerve endings and pressure points in the head, hands, and feet to revitalize the body and release muscle tension.

APPENDIX B
STUDY 3—MAIN COURSE CHOICE SET

Travel Notes
Casserole of Parmesan cheese with baked pear, lightly spiced zucchini, and mint pesto

A Stroll around the Villa
Thin egg noodles with artichokes, garlic, and a sweet black salsify, pomegranate

The Splendor of the Afternoon
Buckwheat ravioli stuffed with goat ricotta, cep mushrooms, and scalded spring onions

A Trip to the Village
Risotto with Trevisan radicchio, contrast in chestnut honey, smoked provolone froth

APPENDIX C
STUDY 3—TRAINING-CAMP CHOICE SET

Military Boot Camp
A mix of long-distance running, short-distance swimming, and circuit training

Iron Men Training Camp
A mix of short distance running, long-distance swimming, and endurance-building exercises

Power Biathlon Camp
A mix of long-distance biking, short-distance swimming, and strength training

Master Cardio Camp
A mix of long-distance biking, repeated uphill sprints, and cardiovascular exercises

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