I, Ashley S Otto, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration.

It is entitled:
Why We Decide Not to Decide

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Why We Decide Not to Decide

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Abstract

Decision making is all too often an aversive experience that can elicit in decision makers the rather paradoxical decision to resolve this aversion by, essentially, avoiding it. In my first essay, I present a framework that outlines the importance of the desire for closure in prompting decision makers to bypass the decision-making process by engaging in decision sidestepping (a superordinate classification of decision-making strategies). In my second essay, I detail how even fundamental consumer judgments (i.e., emotional vs. rationally-focused decisions) elicit greater decision avoidance due to the aversion implicit in the choice—here, the perceived mental resources necessary to make a decision. In both these essays, then, I sought to offer unique insight into the novel motivations that stimulate a desire to avoid decisions and a framework to understand when and why individuals rely on these strategies to resolve the aversive experience of decision making.
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Essay 1:

Decision sidestepping:

How the motivation for closure prompts individuals to bypass decision making
We all too often have to make decisions—from the mundane (e.g., what to eat for breakfast) to the complex (e.g., what to buy a loved one)—and yet there exists a multitude of strategies that allows us to make a decision. This work focuses on a subset of decision strategies that allows individuals to make decisions by bypassing the decision-making process—a phenomenon I term *decision sidestepping*. Critical to the present manuscript, however, I contend that decision sidestepping stems from the motivation to achieve closure. I link this proposition back to the fundamental nature of closure and how those seeking closure are highly bothered by decision making. As such, I argue that the motivation to achieve closure prompts a reliance on sidestepping strategies (e.g., default bias, status quo bias, choice delegation, inaction inertia, option fixation) to reduce the bothersome nature of decision making. In support of this framework, five experiments demonstrate that (i) those seeking closure are more likely to engage in decision sidestepping, (ii) the effect of closure on sidestepping stems from the bothersome nature of decision making, and (iii) the reliance on sidestepping results in downstream consequences for subsequent choice. Taken together, these findings offer unique insight into the cognitive motivations stimulating a reliance on decision sidestepping and thus a novel framework by which to understand how individuals make decisions while bypassing the decision-making process.
Birthdays come, dinners need planned, and cars breakdown. In each situation, decisions must be made—and yet, rather interestingly, there often exists a multitude of ways to make each decision. To illustrate, imagine two individuals ordering an entrée at a new restaurant. One of these individuals elects to choose an option from the menu, whereas the other elects to choose the waiter’s recommendation. Though both options represent a similar outcome (i.e., an entrée), they do not require the individuals to endure the same process. That is, though different strategies can generate even the same decision (e.g., selecting the same entrée), they can present a very different means by which decision makers come to that decision.

In light of these different processes, my interest is in the possibility that a subset of strategies represent a common means of decision making (for similar arguments, see Anderson, 2003; Luce, 1998). That is, I propose that a series of well-documented decision strategies—default bias, choice delegation, status quo bias, inaction inertia, option fixation—all allow individuals to make a choice by bypassing or “sidestepping” the process. Though these strategies are diverse in their makeup, the present research offers a novel framework by which to unify decision makers’ reliance on them through a common motivation. Specifically, I propose that the motivation to achieve cognitive closure heightens the bothersome nature of decision making prompting individuals to engage in (what I term) decision sidestepping.

**Decision Sidestepping**

Decision sidestepping is the tendency to rely on decision strategies that allow an individual to bypass (i.e., streamline) the decision-making process. I propose that a collective of distinct, decision strategies embody this notion of decision sidestepping. Five such strategies are considered here. Specifically, by relying on the default option (Baron & Ritov, 1994; Johnson & Goldstein, 2003), delegating a choice (Tetlock & Boettger, 1994), maintaining an established
status quo (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988), or sticking with a prior decision (Mannetti, Pierro, & Kruglanski, 2007; Tykocinski, Pittman, & Tuttle, 1995), an individual has the opportunity to essentially bypass the decision-making process while still making a choice. Though these decision strategies certainly differ in a variety of ways, I contend that they are fundamentally linked in their ability to allow individuals the opportunity to engage in decision sidestepping.

Yet why would individuals rely on these specific strategies to sidestep decisions? I contend that the strategies in this collective each present decision makers with a choice precedent—defined as an established or pre-existing standard—that is seen as a justifiable basis for making a choice. To illustrate, the default bias, choice delegation, status quo bias, inaction inertia, and option fixation all converge with respect to the notion that they are either based on a norm (e.g., the default bias, the status quo bias), a prior decision (e.g., inaction inertia, option fixation), or a credible source (e.g., choice delegation). As such, this precedent may be either explicit (e.g., delegating to a credible source; Mansell, Poses, Kazis, & Duefield, 2000) or implicit (e.g., relying a prior decision; Chernev, 2004) to the decision maker. Of most importance, however, the presence of a choice precedent in the strategy is critical to sidestepping; otherwise, the decision could be based on an option that lacks a valid basis for choosing (e.g., reliance on a random option or a non-credible source).

In summary, then, I conceptualize decision sidestepping as the tendency to bypass the decision-making process by relying on a collective of strategies that allows individuals to base their decision on a choice precedent. My interest, however, is not only in demonstrating the convergence of these diverse strategies under decision sidestepping but also in presenting a framework by which to understand why individuals’ engage in decision sidestepping. In response, I propose that decision sidestepping stems from the motivation to achieve cognitive
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closure (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; see Roets, Kruglanski, Kossowska, Pierro, & Hong, 2015).

The Need for Cognitive Closure

The need for cognitive closure is defined as a fundamental desire to achieve resolution on a decision (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The motivation encompasses the desire for a definite answer and, as such, individuals motivated to achieve closure favor order and predictability, are decisive and close-minded, and find discomfort with openness (Acar-Burkay, Fennis, & Warlop, 2014; Disatnik & Steinhart, 2015; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2003; see Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). As a result, those seeking closure are fundamentally motivated to reduce the bothersome or aversive nature of unresolved decisions (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; see Kruglanski & Chun, 2008). Indeed, this aversion to openness is so strong that those seeking closure are willing to engage in considerable effort to resolve a decision they then needn’t reconsider (Vermeir, Van Kenhove, & Hendrickx, 2002; see Roets et al., 2015).

Importantly, this bothersome feeling is more than a mere psychological itch; the pressing urge for closure has been shown to stimulate physiological consequences such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, and arousal when activated in decision contexts (Roets & Van Hiel, 2008). In fact, this distress can aversively impact mental health (e.g., elevated levels of anxiety and depression) when those seeking closure are exposed to a decision-making situation (Roets & Soetens, 2010). As such, decision makers seeking closure are theorized to engage in a systematic process whereby two sequential phases facilitate the immediate reduction of this aversive state: an urgency and permanency phase (see Kruglanski, 2004). The urgency phase refers to an individual’s tendency to “seize” on a solution to induce an overwhelming sense of resolution.
The *permanence* phase refers to the individual’s desire to preserve that solution by “freezing” on the given information and the resolution it provides.

My interest is in the extent to which cognitive closure prompts individuals to engage in decision sidestepping. That is, due to the inherent openness of decision making, the motivation to achieve closure should heighten the bothersome or aversive nature of making decisions. Consequently, I predict that those seeking closure engage in decision sidestepping to reduce feeling bothered, as sidestepping should allow these individuals to seize and freeze upon a justifiable option to achieve resolution across a diverse array of decision contexts.

**Overview**

Decision sidestepping is the tendency to bypass the decision-making process by relying on a collective of strategies tied to a choice precedent. Though this phenomenon represents a subset of diverse strategies, the present research offers a conceptual framework to unify decision makers’ reliance on these strategies through a common motivation. Specifically, I propose that those seeking cognitive closure engage in decision sidestepping to reduce the bothersome or aversive nature of decision making (see Figure 1 for conceptual model).

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.
Five experiments are presented in support of this framework, with the goal of expanding our insight into the means by which individuals make decisions by sidestepping the process. In particular, I examine the association between cognitive closure and decision sidestepping in a field study (Experiment 1), test the extent to which the effect of closure on sidestepping is due to decision making being perceived as bothersome (Experiments 2 and 3), show the robustness of the effect by testing the ubiquity of sidestepping (Experiment 4), and demonstrate the consequence of decision sidestepping for suboptimal choice (Experiment 5). Additionally, I empirically address alternative mechanisms—uncertainty avoidance (Experiment 1), mental laziness (Experiment 2), and regret (Experiment 4)—to bolster support for my proposed causal framework.

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Levav, Kivetz, & Cho, 2010; Luce, 1998; Savary, Kleiman, Hassin, & Dhar, 2015), all experiments model a similar structure that capitalize on methodological variations due to the specific sidestepping strategy under study (i.e., default bias, choice delegation, status quo bias, inaction inertia, option fixation). For instance, although Experiment 1 focuses on the default and Experiment 4 focuses on inaction inertia, both explore the possible association between the motivation to attain closure and decision sidestepping within the classic paradigms used to test these strategies. Additionally, to further clarify this general structure, higher values in each experiment are coded to indicate greater sidestepping.¹

**Experiment 1**

¹ Two aspects of the study sampling and exclusion criteria are worth noting. First, sample size estimates were based on previous research that also tested multiple decision strategies (Luce, 1998; Levav et al., 2010). Importantly, to account for the estimated effect sizes of the meditational analysis, I increased the sample size of Experiment 2 (following the recommendations of Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Second, participants were excluded from experiments if they either failed to complete the experiment (Experiment 2: 4 participants, Experiment 4: 1 participant; Experiment 5: 2 participants) or reported an allergy to the focal stimuli (Experiment 1: 1 participant).
I conducted an initial experiment to test my primary hypothesis that decision sidestepping stems from the motivation to achieve cognitive closure. Here, decision sidestepping was operationalized via reliance on the *default*. The default option represents a given choice unless otherwise specified (Baron & Ritov, 2009; Johnson & Goldstein, 2003, 2004; Yu, Mobbs, Seymour, & Calder, 2010).

**Method**

**Participants and design.** Ninety-three undergraduates (51% Female; \(M_{\text{age}} = 21\)) were recruited to participate in a study on a university-wide personality profile in exchange for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two transparency conditions before completing a dispositional index of need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

**Procedure.** Participants were informed at the outset of the researchers’ supposed interest in obtaining an assessment of a personality profile of the student body at their university. Prior to completing the personality profile, however, participants were informed that—as an additional thank you for their time—they would be offered candy. Critical to my purposes, all participants were explicitly told they would receive a specific candy option as the default unless they noted otherwise (these instructions were adapted from Brown & Krishna, 2004). In the event that they deviated from the default, participants had the opportunity to select an alternative option from a variety bag.

Importantly, to ensure that any effects were due to the presentation of a default and not any uncertainty surrounding the alternative options, I manipulated the transparency of the variety bag across experimental sessions. As such, the specific contents of the variety bag were either known or unknown to participants. In the *known* condition, participants were explicitly told that the contents of the variety bag (i.e., Milky Way, KitKat, and Starburst), while in the *unknown*
condition participants were told nothing about the contents of the variety bag. Furthermore, to ensure any effects were not due to the specific type of candy being offered, the default option (i.e., milk chocolate M&Ms or Snickers) varied across experimental sessions.

After indicating whether they would stick with the default or select an alternative option, participants completed a series of items related to their personality as a filler task before completing the 15-item Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (α = .84: Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). Example items from the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale include: “I dislike unpredictable situations,” “I don’t like going into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it,” and “I like to have a place for everything and everything in its place.”

Upon completing the scale, participants were provided with their chosen candy, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

**Results**

Participants’ candy choice was coded as 0 if they opted out of the default or 1 if they stayed with the default option. I then submitted these choice data to a hierarchical logistic regression, with transparency (0 = known, 1 = unknown) and need for closure (continuous, mean-centered) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction in the second step (following the recommendations of Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The analysis revealed only a main effect of need for closure (β = 1.36, Wald’s χ² = 10.72, p = .001; see Table 1 for predicted probabilities). Consistent with expectations, participants’ likelihood to rely on the default option increased with their need for closure.² Importantly, neither the main effect of transparency (p > .06) nor the need for closure × transparency interaction (p > .86) were significant.

² For those interested, treating the default option (0 = M&Ms, 1 = Snickers) as a factor in a separate need for closure × transparency × default option hierarchical logistic regression did not impact the results (p > .53). Thus, the association between closure and the default did not vary as a function of the specific default option.
Table 1. Predicted choice probabilities as a function of transparency and need for closure in Experiment 1. Note: Higher probabilities indicate a greater likelihood to select the default option.

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<th>High Closure (+1 SD)</th>
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Discussion

The findings from Experiment 1 offer initial evidence that those seeking closure are more likely to engage in decision sidestepping. Indeed, the likelihood to rely on the default option increased with individuals’ need for cognitive closure. Moreover, this heightened reliance on the default occurred despite altering the specific default option across participants (see Footnote 2). In fact, exit interviews revealed no one indicated either of the default options as their favorite candy. The potential to obtain their favorite candy from the variety bag, then, appeared to matter less to those high in need for closure than did the opportunity to sidestep the decision. Finally, the reliance on the default occurred irrespective of whether the contents of the variety bag were known or unknown, a finding that suggests those high in need for closure were not relying on the default option merely as a means of avoiding uncertainty in the unknown condition.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, I directly tested the proposition that those seeking closure sidestep decisions as a means of reducing the bothersome or aversive nature of decision making. That is, given that those seeking closure are innately bothered by decision making (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Chun, 2008), I believe that these individuals strategically engage in decision sidestepping to reduce the bothersome nature of decisions and achieve resolution. Moreover, given my contention that those seeking closure are highly motivated to attain resolution
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(Vermeier et al., 2002), I tested the extent to which the effects of closure on decision sidestepping were independent of mental laziness.

Two other aspects of the experiment are important to note. First, I directly manipulated participants’ need for closure to clarify any causal interpretation of the reliance on decision sidestepping. Importantly, this manipulation of cognitive closure is specifically designed to isolate the motivation to achieve cognitive closure and thus avoided any prior manipulation that could arguably conflate motivational differences with differences in ability (e.g., cognitive load: Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; time pressure: Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; noise: Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993) (for further discussion of this issue, see Roets et al., 2015). Second, I focused on an alternative form of decision sidestepping—choice delegation. Choice delegation is manifested in allowing another individual to make a decision on one’s behalf (Aggarwal & Mazumdar, 2008; Tetlock & Boettger, 1994; Solomon, 1986).

Method

Participants and design. Ninety-six participants (60% Male; \(M_{age} = 31.52\)) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on decision making. Participants were randomly assigned to either a high or low need for closure condition.

Procedure. After being welcomed to the study, participants were informed of the researchers’ interest in obtaining their reaction to recent research findings concerning the manner in which people make decisions. This information constituted my manipulation of need for closure (for similar manipulations of sub-dimensions of need for closure, see Clarkson, Valente, Leone, & Tormala, 2013; Mayseless & Kruglanski, 1987). In both conditions, participants were told:
Researchers have long been interested in individuals’ motivation to gain a sense of closure with their decisions. That is, some individuals are highly motivated to achieve closure on a decision, whereas others are not motivated at all to achieve closure on a decision. For instance, when making plans, some individuals prefer to immediately and quickly finalize their plans, whereas others prefer to wait and slowly finalize their plans. However, in the high closure condition, participants were additionally informed that a supposed analysis of forty-years of research on closure in decision making shows that “decision quality greatly increases when individuals are highly motivated to achieve closure on a decision” and that “desiring closure is critical to generating quality decisions.” Conversely, in the low closure condition, participants were additionally informed that “decision quality greatly increases when individuals are not motivated to achieve closure on a decision” and that “not desiring closure is critical to generating quality decisions.”

Following the need for closure manipulation, participants were asked to imagine that they were shopping at a popular electronics store for a sound system to accompany a recently purchased television. Moreover, after browsing the options in the store, they had tentatively decided on a sound system to purchase. They were then approached by a sales associate who recommended purchasing a sound system of similar price but different than their selection. Participants were then asked to indicate which option they would end up selecting on a binary scale anchored at 0 – Their tentative choice or 1 – The recommended choice.

To assess the efficacy of this manipulation, I conducted a pilot study (N = 60) in which participants were randomly assigned to either the high or low need for closure manipulation prior to completing Roets and Van Hiel’s (2011) Need for Closure Scale (α = .88). However, to assess whether the manipulation affected need for closure and not participants’ motivation to elaborate or mental laziness, participants also completed the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984), an assessment of situational elaboration (Barden & Petty, 2008; Wan, Rucker, Tormala, & Clarkson, 2010), and the mental laziness scale (see Experiment 2). A one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) revealed only a significant main effect of the manipulation (F(1,58) = 4.62, p = .036); as expected, those in the high closure condition (M = 4.08, SD = .59) scored significantly higher on the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale than did those in the low closure condition (M = 3.60, SD = 1.07). The manipulation showed no effect on need for cognition (p > .77), situational elaboration (p > .55), or mental laziness (p > .26).
Following the choice, I assessed participants’ aversion toward the choice and their mental laziness, with the order of each measure randomized. To assess the bothersome nature of the decision, participants rated the decision on the following four-item scale (presented in random order): How much of a bother was this decision for you? How troubling was this decision for you? How irritating was this decision for you? How aggravating was this decision for you? Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at Not much at all—Very much and averaged ($\alpha = .72$), such that higher values indicated a more bothersome or aversive decision.

To assess mental laziness, participants responded to the following four-items (adapted from Meyers, Glaser, & Donald, 1998) (presented in random order): How lazy were you in making your decision? How diligent were you in making your decision? (reverse-scored) How motivated were you in making your decision? (reverse-scored) How interested were you in making your decision? (reverse-scored) Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at Not at all—Very and averaged ($\alpha = .82$) such that higher values indicated greater mental laziness.

Upon completing these items, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

**Results**

**Choice delegation.** Participants’ choice in sound system was coded as 0 – Their tentative choice or 1 – The recommended choice. These data were then submitted to a chi-square test to compare the difference as a function of need for closure. The analysis revealed a significant difference in choice based on the need for closure ($\chi^2 (1, N = 96) = 4.96, p = .026$); those in the high need for closure condition (27.48%) were more likely to delegate choice than were those in the low need for closure condition (9.52%).

**Bothersome.** The bothersome index was submitted to a t-test, with need for closure as the
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independent variable. The analysis revealed a significant effect of need for closure ($t(94) = 1.99, p = .049$), such that individuals’ high in need for closure ($M = 3.69; SD = 1.74$) were more bothered by the decision than those low in need for closure ($M = 3.07; SD = 1.22$).

**Mental Laziness.** As with the bothersome index, the mental laziness index was submitted to a t-test, with need for closure as the independent variable. The analysis, however, revealed no effect of need for closure ($p > .90$).\(^4\)

**Mediation analyses.** I used bootstrapping procedures to assess the extent to which the effect of need for closure on choice delegation is driven by the bothersome nature of the decision (Hayes, 2013). The analysis revealed a significant mediating pathway through the bothersome index (95% CI: .01, .90 see Figure 2 for full path analysis). Indeed, the effect of need for closure on participants’ choice through bothersome remained significant even when including mental laziness in the model (95% CI: .001, .90).

**Figure 2.** Path analysis in Experiment 2. Note: Values in parentheses indicate standardized beta coefficients before controlling for other variables in the model. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.\(^5\)

Discussion

Experiment 2 sought to offer initial insight into the underlying process driving the

\(^4\) I also assessed the amount of time participants’ spent choosing as an additional index of laziness (for similar research that indexed effort by time spent making the decision, see Bettman, Johnson, & Payne, 1990; Luce, 1998). Similar to the mental laziness scale, analysis of the choice time data did not reveal a relationship between individuals need for closure and the amount of time spent making a choice ($p > .27$).
reliance of those seeking closure on decision sidestepping. The findings revealed that (i) those high in need for closure reported the *same* decision as more bothersome than did those low in need for closure, and (ii) this difference mediated participants’ decision to delegate their choice. Moreover, this effect occurred absent differences in mental laziness. This finding is consistent with research showing that those seeking closure are motivated to attain resolution irrespective of the amount of effort invested in the choice (Vermeir et al., 2002). Along with uncertainty (Experiment 1), then, my findings suggest that the increased reliance on decision sidestepping by those seeking closure is also independent of mental laziness (see also Luce, 1998).

**Experiment 3**

Experiment 2 offered support for the hypothesis that those seeking closure engage in decision sidestepping to reduce the bothersome nature of decision making. In the present experiment, I sought to bolster that mediation support by directly manipulating the proposed mechanism (following the recommendation of Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). In particular, those high in need for closure should engage in decision sidestepping when decision making is bothersome; when the bothersome nature of the decision is minimized, I expect those high in need for closure to decrease the extent to which they sidestep decisions.

**Experiment 3a**

I conducted an initial experiment that directly manipulated the bothersome nature of the decision for individuals high and low in need for closure. Additionally, I focused on an alternative form of decision sidestepping—the *status quo* (Chernev, 2004; Inman & Zeelenberg, 2002; see Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988).
Method

Participants and design. Seventy-five participants (57% Female; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.28$) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on menu design. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either a categorized (i.e., low bothersome) or uncategorized (i.e., high bothersome) menu. I also obtained a dispositional index of participants’ need for closure.

Procedure. Upon being welcomed to the study, participants were informed upfront of the researchers’ interests in obtaining their reactions toward different menu designs. Specifically, they were told they would be rating one of several potential menus for an avant-garde restaurant (The Standard). Furthermore, to help evaluate the menu, participants were instructed to imagine they were actually dining at the restaurant for dinner. Participants were then randomly assigned to receive one of two menus. In the uncategorized (i.e., high bothersome) condition, participants received a menu layout where all items were listed together. However, in the categorized (i.e., low bothersome) condition, participants received a menu layout where options were broken up by categories (see Appendix A for stimuli). The bothersome manipulation is consistent with previous research, which shows that categorizing information makes decision making less aversive (Dhar, 1997; see Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar, 2008). Importantly, the content across both menus did not differ—only the extent to which they were viewed as bothersome.5

5 The menu designs were submitted to a pilot study ($N = 50$) in which participants were randomly assigned to receive either the uncategorized (i.e., high bothersome) or categorized (i.e., low bothersome) menu before indicating how bothersome they found it to process the menu on the following four items: How much of a bother was it to process the content of the menu? How troubling was it to process the content of the menu? How irritating was it to process the content of the menu? How aggravating was it to process the content of the menu? Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at Not much at all—Very much and averaged ($\alpha = .95$), such that higher values indicated a more bothersome menu. Consistent with expectations, the analysis revealed a significant difference in bothersome based on menu type ($t(48) = 2.06, p = .045$). Specifically, the uncategorized menu ($M = 4.08, SD = 2.59$) was reported as more bothersome than the categorized menu ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.95$).
To provide a status quo option, participants were informed of *The Standard Favorite*, a local menu standout that was reasonably priced within the mix of various entrées. This information about the status quo option was also printed at the bottom of each menu. After reviewing their menu, participants were then asked to select their own entrée from the menu or to select *The Standard Favorite*. If they selected their own entrée, they were then asked to type in a box which entrée they chose.

Upon indicating their dining choice, participants then rated the design of the menu on a series of items consistent with the cover story. Finally, participants completed the 15-item Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (α = .86; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011) before being debriefed and thanked for their participation.

**Results**

Participants’ choice was coded as 0 if they opted to select their own choice or 1 if they relied on the status quo. These choice data were then analyzed using hierarchical logistic regression, with need for closure (continuous, mean-centered) and menu type (0 = categorized, 1 = uncategorized) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction in the second step (Cohen et al., 2003).

This analysis revealed the predicted need for closure × menu type interaction (β = 1.95, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 7.30, p = .007$) (see Figure 3). For those high in need for closure (+1 SD), there was a significant difference in participants’ choice to rely on the status quo based on menu type (β = 1.77, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 5.16, p = .023$). For those low in need for closure (-1 SD), menu type had no effect on participants’ choice to rely on the status quo ($p > .09$). As expected, neither main effect was significant ($ps > .65$).
Figure 3. Choice estimates as a function of menu type and need for closure in Experiment 3a. Note: Higher (lower) values indicate a greater likelihood to rely on the status quo (vs. make own) choice. The categorized menu represents the low bothersome condition and the uncategorized menu represents the high bothersome condition.

Experiment 3b

Experiment 3b sought to bolster the findings of Experiment 3a in three important ways. First, I manipulated (rather than measured) need for closure to strengthen the causal argument. Second, I altered the manipulation of bothersome and the measure of decision sidestepping (choice delegation; see Experiment 2) to assess the generalizability of the effect. Finally, I amended the paradigm to heighten the consequence of the decision for participants.

Viewed differently, those in the uncategorized (i.e., high bothersome) menu condition showed a marginal difference in the likelihood to rely on the status quo as a function of closure ($\beta = .79, \text{ Wald}'s \chi^2 = 2.78, p = .096$), such that reliance on the status quo increased with need for closure. Those in the categorized (i.e., low bothersome) menu condition showed a significant difference in the likelihood to rely on the status quo as a function of closure ($\beta = -1.16, \text{ Wald}'s \chi^2 = 4.54, p = .033$), such that reliance on the status quo decreased with need for closure. Thus, when the bothersome nature of the decision was experimentally reduced, those seeking closure were less likely to engage in decision sidestepping.
Method

Participants and design. Eighty Amazon Mechanical Turk participants (57% Female; \(M_{\text{age}} = 36.30\)) completed a study on online videos. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (need for closure: high or low) x 2 (video layout: horizontal or vertical) between subjects design.

Procedure. Following an introduction to the study, participants were told of the researchers’ interest in their reaction to new decision-making research. I then presented participants with the closure manipulation used in Experiment 2. Recall this manipulation presented participants with information about a supposed research review highlighting the advantages of either achieving closure (i.e., high closure condition) or not achieving closure (i.e., low closure condition) with decisions.

Afterward, participants were told of the researchers’ desire to obtain their reaction to one of several videos. They were then presented with six video options. Each video option was represented by a picture (i.e., screenshot of the video) and corresponding title. Importantly, one of the six video options was marked beneath the title as the recommended choice, which participants were told was a video ostensibly recommended by an individual who works for an independent firm that evaluates online videos. To control for any unexpected bias in video attractiveness, I randomized across participants which of the six videos was listed as the recommended choice. Participants were then asked to choose a video to watch. Specifically, whether they would like to make their own choice or delegate to the recommended choice.

To manipulate the bothersome nature of the decision, I altered the visual array of the videos. In the high bothersome condition, the six video options were presented vertically in a single column. In the low bothersome condition, the six video options were presented horizontally in a 2x3 matrix. This manipulation was based on research showing that people are
more inclined to process information horizontally (vs. vertically) (Goldberg, Stimson, Lewenstein, Scott, & Wichansky, 2002; see Appendix B for stimuli).  

Participants then watched the video of their choice—either their own selection or the recommended choice. Consistent with the cover story, participants then provided their feedback on their selected video before being debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

Participants’ choice was coded as 0 if they opted to select their own choice or 1 if they delegated to the recommended choice. The data were submitted to a hierarchical logistic regression, with need for closure (0 = low closure, 1 = high closure) and video layout (0 = horizontal, 1 = vertical) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction in the second step (Cohen et al., 2003).

Consistent with Experiment 3a, the analysis revealed a significant need for closure × video layout interaction ($\beta = 2.87$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.47, p = .035$) (see Figure 4). For those in the high closure condition, there was a significant difference in participants’ likelihood to delegate choice as a function of video layout ($\chi^2 (1, N = 40) = 5.23, p = .022$), such that participants were more likely to delegate choice in the vertical (40%) versus horizontal (6.67%) layout condition. However, for those in the low need for closure condition, the video layout had no effect on participants’ likelihood to delegate choice ($p > .41$). As expected, neither main effect was significant ($ps > .30$).

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7 The video layouts were submitted to a pilot study ($N = 52$) to ensure that the vertical layout of videos was perceived to be more bothersome than the horizontal layout. Participants were randomly assigned to either receive the vertical (i.e., high bothersome) or horizontal (i.e., low bothersome) video layout and asked to rate how bothersome they found it to process the video options, adapting the items from the menu pretest to fit the video paradigm (see Footnote 5; $\alpha = .85$). Analysis revealed a significant difference in bothersome based on the layout ($t(50) = 2.35, p = .023$), such that the vertical layout ($M = 3.36, SD = 2.07$) was reported to be significantly more bothersome than the horizontal layout ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.14$).
Figure 4. Response frequencies as a function of video layout and need for closure in Experiment 3b. *Note: Higher (lower) percentages indicate a greater likelihood to delegate (vs. make own) choice. The horizontal layout represents the low bothersome condition and the vertical layout represents the high bothersome condition.*

Discussion

The findings of Experiment 3 offer robust support for the hypothesis that those seeking closure sidestep decisions to reduce the bothersome nature of decision making. Indeed, those seeking closure were more likely to engage in decision sidestepping (here, choice delegation) when decision making was highly bothersome; by experimentally *reducing* the bothersome nature of the decision, those seeking closure reported less reliance on decision sidestepping. Moreover, these effects occurred across different paradigms, different indices of sidestepping, and different layouts.

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8 Viewed differently, those in the vertical layout (i.e., *high bothersome*) condition showed a non-significant trend in the likelihood to delegate choice as a function of closure ($\chi^2 (1, N = 40) = 1.71, p = .197$), such that those in the high (vs. low) closure condition were *more* likely to delegate choice. Those in the horizontal (i.e., *low bothersome*) condition showed a marginal difference in the likelihood to delegate choice as a function of closure ($\chi^2 (1, N = 40) = 3.45, p = .063$), such that those in the high (vs. low) closure condition were *less* likely to delegate choice. Consistent with Experiment 3a, then, those seeking closure were less likely to engage in decision sidestepping when the bothersome nature of the decision was experimentally reduced.
and different manipulations of bothersome. Additionally, these findings were observed irrespective of whether need for closure was measured (Experiment 3a) or manipulated (Experiment 3b). These findings, then, are consistent with the results of Experiment 2 while offering direct support for the importance of bothersome in driving the reliance on decision sidestepping in those seeking closure.

**Experiment 4**

My integration of these specific decision strategies under decision sidestepping focuses on their ability to reduce the bothersome nature of decisions. Importantly, however, prior work has theoretically linked a subset of sidestepping strategies to the motivation to reduce feelings of regret (see Anderson, 2003). Indeed, decision makers are highly sensitive to feelings of regret and therefore base their decisions on options that allow them to reduce it (Arkes, Kung, & Hutzel, 2002; Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Simonson, 1992; Tsiros & Mittal, 2000). Thus, I sought to directly test this competing hypothesis within my framework.

That is, though the anticipation of regret is clearly unpleasant, I contend that (at times) it can be overridden or eclipsed by feelings of bothersome. To that end, I explored the possibility that individuals seeking closure would engage in decision sidestepping in contexts where the potential for regret is minimized.

To test this possibility, I relied on an alternative sidestepping strategy—*inaction inertia*. Inaction inertia is demonstrated when an individual continues to reject an option that is similar to a previously rejected option (Tykocinski & Pittman, 1998; Tykocinski et al., 1995). For instance, individuals presented with an opportunity to purchase a tablet at 10% off are more likely to reject the offer if they previously rejected an opportunity to purchase a similar tablet at 15% off, even though the initial offer does nothing to diminish the absolute value of the subsequent offer.
According to this research, individuals are more likely to reject the second offer to reduce feelings of regret over not taking advantage of the initial offer (Arkes et al., 2002; Sevdalis, Harvey, & Yip, 2006; Tsiros, 2009; Tykocinski & Pittman, 1998). Consistent with this regret account, reliance on inaction inertia only occurs when the subsequent offer is worse than the initial offer and the discrepancy between the initial and subsequent offer is substantial (Sevdalis et al., 2006; Tykocinski et al., 1995), as both conditions enhance the potential for regret over not taking advantage of the initial offer.

I propose that neither the size of the discrepancy between offers nor the value of the subsequent offer relative to the initial offer should inhibit the likelihood to engage in inaction inertia (i.e., reject the subsequent offer) for those motivated to achieve closure. That is, individuals who freeze on their decision should be more likely to demonstrate inaction inertia as to not revisit that decision and thus maintain their resolution irrespective of the attractiveness of the subsequent offer. I therefore altered the classic inaction inertia paradigm to allow for a test of the predictive value of cognitive closure under conditions shown to not alter feelings of regret. Specifically, I used a minimal rather than a substantial discrepancy between the initial and subsequent offers and I added a condition where the subsequent offer actually improved upon the initial offer, as these conditions should reduce (if not remove) regret. Thus, I expected those high (vs. low) in the need for cognitive closure should be more likely to reject the second offer, even if the second offer minimized the potential for regret (i.e., was minimal in discrepancy or improved upon the initial offer).

**Method**

**Participants and design.** One hundred twenty-one participants (53% Male; $M_{age} = 33.80$) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on decision
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making. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: an attenuation condition in which the subsequent offer was worse than the initial offer, an enhancement condition in which the subsequent offer was better than the initial offer, or a control condition in which participants only received the subsequent offer. At the conclusion of the study, I obtained a dispositional assessment of participants’ need for cognitive closure.

Procedure. After being welcomed to the study, participants were asked to consider the possibility of either buying or upgrading their existing phone to a new smartphone. Participants in the control condition were asked to imagine they saw a commercial from a retailer advertising a weeklong deal on smartphones at a discounted price of 12%. They were then asked to indicate whether or not they would take advantage of this opportunity on a binary scale labeled 0 – No or 1 – Yes. Prior to imagining this offer, however, participants in the attenuation and enhancement conditions were asked to imagine they had rejected an earlier offer to purchase a smartphone. Specifically, they were told to imagine they saw a commercial for a local retailer offering for a limited time either a 14% (i.e., attenuation condition) or 10% (i.e., enhancement condition) discount on all smartphones. They were then informed of the same offer and given the same choice as presented to the control condition. This paradigm was adapted from prior research on inaction inertia (Arkes et al., 2002; Tsiros, 2009; Tykocinski & Pittman, 1998; Tykocinski et al., 1995). To be clear, then, in the attenuation condition, the initially rejected offer decreased from 14% to 12%, whereas in the enhancement condition the initially rejected offer increased from 10% to 12%. In the control condition, participants received only the 12% offer. Following a brief filler task, participants completed the 15-item Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (α = .91) before being debriefed and thanked for their participation.
Results

The choice data were recoded such that higher scores indicated greater inaction inertia ($0 = \text{Different Choice}, 1 = \text{Same Choice}$) and submitted to a hierarchical logistic regression, with prior offer ($0 = \text{control}, 1 = \text{attenuation}, 2 = \text{enhancement}$) and need for closure (continuous, mean-centered) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction in the second step (Cohen et al., 2003). The analysis revealed a significant prior offer $\times$ need for closure interaction ($\beta = .63$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.44$, $p = .035$; see Table 2 for predicted probabilities). For those high in need for closure (+1 SD), there was a significant effect of prior offer ($\beta = .84$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 5.01$, $p = .025$); consistent with expectations, participants were significantly more likely to reject the second offer relative to the control condition in both the attenuation ($\beta = 1.54$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.52$, $p = .033$) and enhancement ($\beta = 1.00$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 5.81$, $p = .016$) conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p > .78$). For those low in need for closure (-1 SD), there was no effect of prior offer on choice ($p > .42$).

Table 2. Predicted choice probabilities as a function of prior offer and need for closure in Experiment 4. Note: Higher probabilities indicate a greater likelihood to engage in inaction inertia.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Low Closure (-1 SD)</th>
<th>High Closure (+1 SD)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attenuation</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td>Enhancement</td>
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Discussion

The findings of Experiment 4 offer further evidence that those high (vs. low) in need for closure are more prone to engage in decision sidestepping, as individuals who seize and freeze
on their decisions were more likely to reject an offer similar to one they previously rejected. Moreover, this heightened inaction inertia occurred even though the discrepancy between offers was minimal and even when the subsequent offer improved upon the initial offer. These findings suggest that those seeking closure persist with their initial decision irrespective of the potential for regret. Of course, this enhancement effect could be bounded; that is, those high in need for closure might choose the improved offer if it is sufficiently substantial enough to “unfreeze” their initial decision. Yet most critical to the present manuscript is that these findings reveal that: (i) the bothersome nature of decision making can occur independent of regret, and (ii) cognitive closure can have a powerful influence on resistance to subsequent (even improved) offers once an initial offer has been rejected (i.e., the enhancement condition).

**Experiment 5**

Experiment 5 sought to further investigate the downstream consequences associated with decision sidestepping. Specifically, if those seeking closure seize *and freeze* on a decision outcome, they should then continue to persist with that choice—even when presented with a more desirable outcome (see also Disatnik & Steinhart, 2015). To test this hypothesis, I relied on an alternative form of decision sidestepping—*option fixation*. Option fixation is manifested in relying on one’s prior decision when confronted with a new choice (Mannetti et al., 2007). Importantly, here, I focused on an individual’s reliance on a prior *action* (vs. inaction; see Experiment 4). For instance, imagine an individual who compares and then chooses stock A over stock B, before then being confronted with a second choice between stock A and stock C. Option fixation is represented in the individual continuing to choose stock A in the second choice, regardless of whether stock C is relatively inferior or superior.
Given that individuals should choose to persist with stock A when stock C is inferior, I focus on the counterintuitive possibility whereby individuals choose stock A even when stock C is superior. That is, I expect those high (vs. low) in need for closure to persist with their prior decision even when faced with more optimal options. Here, then, I had participants actually make an initial decision before being presented with an objectively better alternative.

Method

Participants and design. Fifty-four participants (65% Male; $M_{age} = 32.87$) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to participate in a survey on vacation packages. Participants were randomly assigned to a high or low need for closure condition.

Procedure. After a brief introduction to the study, participants were asked to offer some insight about themselves, an exercise that served as the manipulation of need for cognitive closure. Specifically, participants responded to a six-item version of the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, & Bullington, 2007) where agreement with all items indicated high need for closure. Examples of scale items include: “I dislike unpredictable situations,” “I feel uncomfortable when I don’t understand why an event occurred in my life,” and “I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.” Importantly, participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale with anchors biased to force either agreement or disagreement with these statements (Clarkson, Janiszewski, & Cinelli, 2013; Salancik, 1974; Salancik, & Conway, 1975; Tormala & DeSensi, 2008). Specifically, those in the high closure condition were forced to agree with all six items by responding on a 5-point scale with anchors ranging from Somewhat agree to Completely agree. Conversely, those in the low closure condition were forced to disagree with all six items by responding on a 5-point scale
with anchors ranging from *Somewhat disagree* to *Completely disagree* (see Petrocelli, Martin, & Li, 2010, for further discussion of the validity of this self-perception technique).\(^9\)

I next presented participants with information on two vacation packages. In particular, they were informed that researchers were interested in their reactions to real vacation packages and, to control for perceived differences in pricing, informed participants that all options were similarly priced. Participants were then presented with information about a beach and a city vacation and asked to make a choice between the two packages on a binary scale: 0 – *Beach vacation* or 1 – *City vacation* (see Appendix C for stimuli).

Upon making their initial choice, participants were asked to make a second choice. This choice served as the target decision and presented participants the option between their initial choice and a separate vacation option similar to their initial vacation destination type. Specifically, those who chose the beach (city) vacation were presented with a separate beach (city) vacation package. Importantly, the subsequent vacation package was pretested to be more desirable than the initial vacation package.\(^10\) After evaluating the subsequent vacation package, participants indicated their preference between their initial vacation package and the subsequent

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9 I conducted a pilot study (*N = 57*) to assess the efficacy of this manipulation using the procedure detailed in Footnote 3. The analysis revealed only a significant main effect of the biased scale manipulation on need for closure (*F*(1.55) = 5.54, *p* = .022); those in the *high closure* condition (*M = 4.07, SD = .66*) scored significantly higher on the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (*α = .87*) than did those in the *low closure* condition (*M = 3.60, SD = .83*). The manipulation showed no effect on need for cognition (*p > .06*), situational elaboration (*p > .11*), or mental laziness (*p > .35*).

10 I conducted a pretest (*N = 47*) to ensure the second vacation package was perceived as more desirable than the initial vacation package (see Appendix C for stimuli). Participants were randomly assigned to respond to either the two beach vacations or the two city vacations on the following scales: How desirable is the vacation package? How appealing is the vacation package? How likeable is the vacation package? Responses were given on 9-point scales anchored at *Not at all* to *Very much* and averaged for both the beach (*α = .81*) and city (*α = .96*) vacation packages. Results revealed that the two beach vacation packages differed in overall desirability (*t*(27) = 2.10, *p = .045*), such that participants rated the subsequent vacation (*M = 7.73, SD = 1.05*) as more desirable than the initial vacation (*M = 7.06, SD = 1.46*). Similarly, the two city vacation packages also differed in overall desirability (*t*(18) = 2.20, *p = .041*), such that participants rated the subsequent vacation (*M = 7.53, SD = 1.54*) as more desirable than the initial vacation (*M = 6.98, SD = 1.62*).
(and more desirable) vacation package on a binary scale.

**Results**

The choice data were submitted to a chi-square analysis. Consistent with expectations, the analysis revealed a significant difference in choice based on the closure manipulation ($\chi^2(1, N = 54) = 4.52, p = .033$); those in the high need for closure condition (40.74%) were more likely to stick with their initial choice (rather than the second, more desirable choice) than were those in the low need for closure condition (14.81%).

**Discussion**

The findings of Experiment 5 demonstrate that those seeking closure engage in decision sidestepping even though it resulted in a suboptimal choice. That is, those in the high need for closure condition were more likely to repeat their initial choice (i.e., option fixation) compared to those in the low need for closure condition, an effect that occurred despite the second vacation package being rated more desirable than the initial vacation package (see Footnote 10). Moreover, this effect was not constrained to a specific decision, as the effect occurred regardless of whether participants’ initial preference was for a beach or city vacation (see Footnote 11). Thus, those seeking closure will engage in decision sidestepping at the expense of a more optimal choice.

**General Discussion**

The present research sought to unify a diverse set of decision strategies (i.e., default bias, choice delegation, status quo bias, inaction inertia, and option fixation) under the common notion

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11 For those interested, I conducted a secondary analysis to confirm that the initial vacation preference did not differentially impact reliance on decision sidestepping. I ran a hierarchical logistic regression with need for closure (0 = low, 1 = high) and vacation preference (0 = beach, 1 = city) as independent variables in the first step and their interaction in the second (Cohen et al., 2003). Consistent with expectations, neither the main effect for vacation preference ($p > .68$) nor a significant vacation preference × need for closure interaction ($p > .84$) was significant. However, the main effect of closure remained significant ($\beta = 1.42$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.36, p = .037$).
of decision sidestepping. Given that decision sidestepping allows individuals to bypass or streamline the decision-making process, I hypothesized that sidestepping was most likely to occur for those seeking closure. Specifically, I argued that the motivation to attain cognitive closure heightens the bothersome or aversive nature of decision making and, in an effort to reduce this aversion, these individuals engage in decision sidestepping to attain resolution by relying on a justifiable option. Five experiments supported this proposition by demonstrating that (i) those motivated to attain cognitive closure were consistently more likely to sidestep decisions, and (ii) this choice to engage in decision sidestepping was driven by the bothersome nature of the decision.

Several aspects of the findings are worth highlighting. First, in an effort to demonstrate robustness, the effect of closure on sidestepping occurred (i) irrespective of whether the motivation for closure was measured or manipulated, and (ii) across a series of different (and consequential) paradigms. Second, those seeking closure engaged in decision sidestepping only when decision making was viewed as bothersome (Experiment 2); when bothersome was experimentally reduced, so too did the reliance of those seeking closure on decision sidestepping (Experiment 3). Moreover, the mediating role of bothersome was bolstered by the lack of support for several alternative explanations: choice uncertainty (Experiment 1), mental laziness (Experiment 2), and regret (Experiment 4). Third, the motivation for closure led individuals to increase reliance on decision sidestepping at the expense of more optimal options (Experiments 4 and 5), demonstrating that sidestepping can have important downstream consequences for subsequent decisions.

I find these effects especially important given that one could reasonably argue those high in need for closure engage in decision sidestepping as a low effort strategy. Though this
possibility is consistent with the argument that individuals seeking closure rely on precedents to reduce feeling bothered with decision making, I do not believe reliance on decision sidestepping need be a low effort process (see Luce, 1998). In fact, those high in need for closure are motivated to attain resolution, irrespective of the amount of effort invested in the choice (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; Roets et al., 2015) and can even exert more effort in coming to a decision than those low in need for closure (Vermeir et al., 2002). Consistent with this notion, need for closure had no effect on self-reported mental laziness (Experiment 2) or on the amount of time spent making decisions (see Footnote 4). In fact, this lack of difference is consistent with prior theorizing that those seeking closure are sufficiently motivated to expend effort to identify the option that best achieves a permanent solution (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Roets et al., 2015; see also Vermeir et al., 2002).

Lastly, I elected to use the term decision sidestepping to reflect a subset of strategies that provide individuals with a means of choosing while simultaneously streamlining the decision-making process. It’s worth noting that this conceptualization bears resemblance to an alternative classification of strategies that allows individuals’ to avoid or otherwise not make a decision (i.e., decision avoidance: Anderson, 2003; see also Luce, 1998). While the work on decision avoidance is relevant to this body of research in that it conceptually links a similar subset of decision strategies, it does not differentiate between an individual making and not making a choice. That is, choice delegation and choice delay both represent decision avoidance despite both also reflecting a clear difference in outcomes (i.e., the former option leads to making a choice, whereas the latter option leads to not making a choice). My interest is in individuals’ desire to attain (rather than avoid) a decision and I believe the label decision sidestepping more accurately captures this phenomenon.
A Test of Convergence

Critical to this research is the argument that these distinct yet classic decision-making strategies share a common bond in that they offer resolution for those seeking closure. To offer further support for this novel framework, I ran an internal meta-analysis to directly test whether these different strategies are tapping into the same construct of decision sidestepping. I included the six experiments from this package that directly compared a sidestepping option to making one’s own choice. The results of the meta-analysis revealed an overall a medium effect size ($Cohen's\ d = .53$). Importantly, the results of the test for heterogeneity reveal that meaningful variance does not exist ($Q = 1.61, p = .90$). However, taking into consideration the relatively small number of studies in the meta-analysis, I also turned to $I^2$ as a measure of variability, where a value of less than 25% is indicative of homogeneity (Higgins, Thompson, Deeks, & Altman, 2003). The analysis revealed an $I^2 = 0\%$. Both values, then, provide direct support for the claim that these decision-making strategies—though often studied independently—do represent a similar construct when viewed through a closure lens.

Future Directions

The present findings provide robust support for the framework surrounding decision sidestepping. Consequently, I believe this perspective offers ample directions for future research. I highlight three such possibilities here.

Motivational Biases in Differentiating Sidestepping Options

Though this research focused on sidestepping options compared to personal preferences, contexts do arise when individuals have the opportunity to choose between different sidestepping strategies. For instance, when frequenting a restaurant, diners could engage in decision sidestepping by either following the waiter’s recommendation or relying on a selection from a
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previous visit. In such instances, I believe certain motivational factors may dictate individuals’ choice between different sidestepping alternatives. As one illustration, consider that the construct of need for closure has been operationalized as consisting of two motivational dimensions: Personal Need for Structure and Personal Fear of Invalidity (see Thompson, Naccarato, Parker, & Moskowitz, 2001). Given those high in need for structure are concerned with order and predictability (Thompson et al., 2001), these individuals might be more likely to rely on sidestepping strategies that are based on prior decisions (e.g., option fixation). Conversely, given those high in personal fear of invalidity are concerned with the accuracy of their decisions (Clarkson et al., 2013b; Thompson et al., 2001), these individuals may be more likely to rely on sidestepping strategies that are based on social validation (e.g., choice delegation). Thus, motivational factors might provide a novel lens into decision makers’ choices when presented with multiple sidestepping strategies.

New Catalysts of Decision Sidestepping

The proposed framework demonstrates that those seeking closure rely on decision sidestepping to reduce the bothersome or aversive nature of decision making. Any factor, then, that heightens the cognitive burden related to decision making should subsequently increase the likelihood of decision sidestepping. For instance, factors such as time pressure (de Dreu, 2003; Kruglanski, & Freund, 1983), a noisy environment (Kruglanski et al., 1993), changes or norm violations (Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2002; Kruglanski, Pierro, Higgins, & Capozza, 2007; Pierro, De Grada, Mannetti, Livi, & Kruglanski, 2004), and a looming deadline (Kruglanski & Webster, 1991) presumably make the decision more bothersome or aversive. If so, then each of these factors should also increase the likelihood of decision sidestepping. In other words, if the bothersome nature of a decision is critical to triggering sidestepping, then
understanding what heightens the bothersome nature of the decision process should offer insight into the factors that elicit decision sidestepping in those seeking closure.

**The Suboptimality of Closure**

The findings of Experiments 4 and 5 demonstrate that those seeking closure engage in suboptimal decision making at the expense of maintaining permanency. However, it is interesting to speculate whether these decisions are in fact suboptimal to those seeking closure. While the observed behavior is undoubtedly suboptimal in an economic sense, it could be argued that these findings are *not* suboptimal in a cognitive sense. That is, the observed ‘suboptimal’ behavior of those seeking closure might actually reflect some level of optimizing with respect to the dimension they perceive as most valuable (i.e., achieving and maintaining resolution). In other words, those seeking closure might find it more optimal to not re-evaluate a decision, even at the expense of more economically-viable options.

**Practical Implications**

Along with avenues of future research, the importance of cognitive closure in the emergence of decision sidestepping offers several practical implications worth noting. For instance, this work has implications for the prosocial efficacy of sidestepping strategies, as research shows individuals are prone to rely on default options irrespective of the prosocial implications. As one illustration, Johnson and Goldstein (2003) show individuals were significantly more likely to become organ donors simply because the default option was to be an organ donor (see also Johnson & Goldstein, 2004; McKenzie, Liersch, & Finkelstein, 2006). The present findings would suggest those seeking closure should be most likely to base their decisions on defaults and consequently any prosocial benefits that are embedded within them. Indeed, this work would also suggest that policy-makers should consider the prosocial
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implications for any sidestepping strategy (e.g., status quo, delegation) given that certain individuals systematically turn to these options to reduce the bothersome nature of decision making.

Additionally, this work offers insight into the viability of social influence techniques. Consider, as an example, the door-in-the-face technique. This social influence strategy increases compliance to the target request by first eliciting an initial rejection to a larger request (Cialdini et al., 1975). The dominant explanation for this effect is that the concession from the larger request to a smaller request on the part of the influencer elicits feelings of reciprocity in decision makers that subsequently increases their likelihood to accept a second, smaller request (Cialdini, 2004; Cialdini et al., 1975; Fennis, Janssen, & Vohs, 2009). Yet the findings from Experiment 4 suggest this effect might be less likely for those high in need for closure, as this need for closure was shown to increase reliance on an initial rejection (i.e., inaction inertia). In fact, this research would suggest that the door-in-the-face technique could actually backfire if the initial rejection provides a sense of resolution that those seeking closure rely on with subsequent choices (see also Disatnik & Steinhart, 2015).

Lastly, the present findings offer potential insight into the behavior of individuals seeking closure, as these decision makers may be especially sensitive to certain options merely as a function of their ability to provide an opportunity to engage in decision sidestepping. For instance, consumers seeking closure may show greater reliance on status quo cues (e.g., the social proof of scarcity; Worchel, Lee, & Adewole, 1975), be more sensitive to subtle recommendations (e.g., greater shelf space allocation; Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, & Young, 2009), and adhere to presumed defaults (e.g., product option framing; Park, Jun, & MacInnis, 2000). Indeed, this reliance should be most pronounced when the decision-making experience is
especially bothersome, such as in unfamiliar or unstructured purchase contexts. Thus, consumers may engage in certain purchases to relieve an aversive process, though this closure may come at the cost of less optimal choices or greater vulnerability to subtle contextual cues.

**Concluding Remarks**

The current findings offer a framework by which to understand what motivates decision sidestepping. Specifically, I propose that decision sidestepping stems from the need for cognitive closure. This need, driven by the bothersome nature of decision making, offers not only a clear mechanism to account for decision sidestepping but also novel hypotheses regarding how individuals rely on decision sidestepping as a choice strategy. Consequently, this research offers unique insight into the decision strategies that represent sidestepping and the factors that facilitate their use. I look to future research to further elucidate the various conditions and choice strategies used to successfully engage in decision sidestepping.
Essay 2:

The drain of emotional decisions
Research has long demonstrated that decisions based on emotions are efficient and less resource demanding than are decisions based on rational thought. In this research, I contend that individuals’ perceptions are opposite of what has been shown to be true. Specifically, I posit that decision makers implicitly believe that emotional decisions require more resources to arrive at a decision and that this misperception drives greater choice postponement. Four experiments support these hypotheses by showing that emotional (vs. rational) decisions elicit greater choice delay and that this effect is due to a miscalibrated perception of the mental drain of emotional decisions.
A fundamental premise in decision making is that making a choice based on emotionality is fast and economical, relative to choices based on rational thought. That is, “going with one’s gut” reliably leads to quicker decision making and requires less processing resources to make a choice than does a more rational focus such as “thinking things through” (Epstein, 1990). This pattern is evident from the robust finding that constraints on processing resources such as cognitive load, time pressure, and distraction increase the reliance on emotionality in decision making (e.g., Nowlis & Shiv, 2005; Pham et al., 2001; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). Thus, relative to its rational counterpart, decisions based on emotionality are highly resource-efficient (see Pham, 2007).

Though prior work has provided important insights into the properties of emotionally-focused decisions, I suggest that individuals’ perceptions of emotionality are opposite of this reality. In particular, I propose that individuals hold an implicit belief that emotional decisions require more resources to arrive at a decision than do rational decisions. Similar then to research demonstrating that individuals tend to overestimate the impact of their emotions on future states (Gilbert et al., 1998), I also argue for an overestimation error—specifically, that individuals perceive emotional decisions as more draining of resources than rational decisions. Critically, however, I contend that individuals act in accord with this miscalibration by demonstrating a greater propensity to postpone or delay decision making.

In the conceptual background that follows, we: (i) outline the distinction between an emotional and rational decision-focus, (ii) discuss perceptions of mental resources for emotionally-focused decisions, and (iii) the implications of this miscalibration for choice delay. I then present four experiments that test these predictions and outline both when and why
individuals’ misperceptions regarding the mental drain of emotional decisions heighten choice delay.

**Conceptual Background**

**Decision Focus**

Consider, for a moment, whether or not to purchase a bag of coffee from the various offerings of your local grocer. While this choice may present an influx of information to consider, researchers make an important distinction between whether that information is emotional (e.g., the aroma of hot coffee, relaxing mornings) or rational (e.g., mental alertness, the speed of making coffee) in nature. In other words, consumers can differentially rely on their feelings (i.e., emotional focus) or thoughts (i.e., rational focus) during decision making (see Mikels et al., 2010, 2011). This specific contrast demonstrates the phenomenon of *decision focus*, defined here as the extent to which an individual is attending to, accessing, or retrieving either emotional or rational information during the decision-making process.

Acknowledging that both emotional and rational information can influence decision making, decision researchers have explored a relative distinction in the primary focus of a decision (e.g., Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009; Mikels et al., 2010; 2011; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). For instance, Mikles and colleagues (2010, 2011) investigated differences in decision focus, by instructing participants to focus on their feelings or focus on the details prior to presenting participants with a decision-making task. Importantly, their work demonstrates that individuals can vary in their emotional or rational focus toward the *same* decision. Researchers have also altered the emotionality or rationality of a decision by using a variety of alternative manipulations such as presentation mode (pictures vs. names; Hsee & Rottenstreich, 2004; Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009), informational-priming (emotional vs. rational information; Hsee &
Rottenstreich, 2004), and product dispositions (emotional vs. rational-laden products; Hsee & Rottenstreich, 2004). Yet, irrespective of the manipulation, these emerging bodies of work are central to the current research, as they collectively demonstrate that the information salient or accessible to the consumer during decision making can be relatively emotional or rational.

This distinction in decision focus is critical, as I posit that the focus of a decision differentially influences individuals’ perceptions of resource demand. That is, implicit in the focus of a decision is a lay belief regarding the amount of mental resources required to make a decision. Specifically, I contend that emotional decisions are believed to be more—rather than less—resource demanding than rational decisions.

**Emotions in Decision Making**

The proposition that consumers perceive emotional decisions to be more resource draining than rational decisions may be rather surprising given the wealth of research surrounding the properties of emotionality and rationality in decision making (see Pham, 2007). Essentially, decisions based on emotions have been characterized as quick, automatic, and affect-laden. These properties are in comparison to decisions based on rationality, which have been characterized as deliberative, slow, and analytical (Pham et al., 2001; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; see Pham, 2007). Indeed, the distinction between emotionality and rationality has been studied in various forms related to decision making (Pacini & Epstein, 1999; Hsee & Rottenstreich, 2004; Mikles et al., 2011; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). Yet, irrespective of the form, research appears to converge with respect to the relative properties of emotions in decision making, such that emotionality is less resource demanding than rationality.

Given this wealth of research, why then would lay theories regarding the resources associated with emotionality not align with these revealed properties? I believe the answer lies in
the misprediction of emotions. That is, while individuals are able to accurately predict the valence of emotions (i.e., positive vs. negative) and even the specific emotions that they will experience (i.e., joy vs. anger; Robinson & Clore, 2001), they are not able to accurately predict the impact and duration of their emotions (i.e., affective forecasting; Wilson et al., 2004). To illustrate, consumers consistently mispredict how much pleasure or displeasure future events will provide them (Lowenstein & Schkade, 1999; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Specifically, consumers tend to overestimate the duration and intensity of their future emotional responses. Moreover, this overestimation is irrespective of the overall valence of emotions—such that individuals mispredict (i.e., overestimate) the impact of both positively and negatively valenced emotions. For instance, college students predicted having stronger emotional reactions to receiving a high or low grade on a future test than they actually experienced (Buehler & McFarland, 2001). Thus, individuals tend to over—rather than under—estimate the impact of emotions on future states (e.g., Gilbert, Driver-Linn, & Wilson, 2002; Gilbert, Lieberman, Morewedge, & Wilson, 2004).

Just as research shows consumers overestimate the impact of emotions, I argue for a similar overestimation error; specifically, I posit that emotional decisions are perceived to be more draining of mental resources than are rational decisions. That is, despite the wealth of research demonstrating that emotional decisions are less resource demanding than rational decisions (Pham, 2007), I contend that consumers perceive emotional decisions are more (not less) resource demanding than are rational decisions.

**Delays Decision Making**

This miscalibration hypothesis—namely, that consumers perceive emotionally-focused decisions as more draining of their mental resources than rationally-focused decisions—presents an interesting twist to this rather fundamental question of when consumers will engage in the
decision-making process. Indeed, consumers all too often delay or postpone making decisions—electing to return at a later point in time (Greenleaf & Lehman, 1995; Simonson, 1992; Krijnen, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2015). As noted, consumers looking to purchase a bag of coffee from their local grocer might decide at that moment to choose among the various options available or they might decide to postpone the decision-making process to a later point in time.

This distinction is important to the concept of choice delay, which is defined by the temporal distinction between initiating and postponing the decision-making process (Simonson, 1992). Indeed, two consumers could engage in the same decision-making process (i.e., purchasing a bag of coffee from a variety of alternatives) but vary in when they decide engage in that process. Thus, I conceptualize choice delay as a specific type of choice deferral that is focused on consumers’ choice to engage or not engage in the decision-making process—rather than the choice to make or not make a specific purchase decision (see Dhar & Nowlis, 2004).

While the decision to postpone or delay a decision may be counterproductive—for instance, by consumers failing to choose when a decision is necessary—the decision to delay can also provide consumers with a means of managing a variety of decision dilemmas. For instance, individuals have been shown to postpone decision making as a result of the complexity of the decision (Dhar, 1997), importance of the task (Krijnen, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2015; Greenleaf & Lehman, 1995), and the anticipation of negative consequences (Anderson, 2003; Luce, 1998). Thus, though choice delay can stem from counterproductive motives (e.g., mental laziness, a disinterest in decision making), it can serve as a strategic means by which to manage decision dilemmas.

Consistent with this notion that choice delay provides a strategic means of managing aversive states, I propose that consumers are more likely to delay decision making as a means of
managing perceptions of insufficient mental resources—a perception I believe to be induced by an emotional (vs. rational) decision focus. Supporting this possibility, Greenleaf and Lehman (1995) demonstrate that consumers with an insufficiency of attentional resources increased the likelihood of choice delay (see also Dhar & Nowlis, 1999). Thus, emotional decisions—by heightening perceptions of resource drain (i.e., an insufficiency of mental resources)—should increase consumers’ likelihood to postpone or delay a choice.

**Overview**

Though research has reliability demonstrated that emotional (vs. rational) decisions require fewer resources to arrive at a decision, I propose that individuals’ are miscalibrated with regard to the perceived resource drain of emotional decisions. The logic for this proposition is twofold. First, I contend that individuals hold a lay belief that emotional decisions are more resource draining, signaling a deficiency of available mental resources (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). Second, I contend that this lay belief related to the drain of emotional decisions should influence whether or not an individual engages in decision making. That is, if an individual perceives an insufficiency of mental resources by which to make a decision, then it follows that an individual should *not* engage in the decision-making process—thereby, delaying choice.

Four experiments are presented in support of these propositions, with the goal of expanding our insight into the role of emotionality in decision making and providing unique insight into the catalysts of choice delay. In particular, I examine the association between decision focus and choice delay in a field study (Experiment 1). I next test the extent to which emotionally-focused decisions heighten delay as a result of a misperception that emotional decisions require more mental resources (Experiment 2). I then bolster support for this miscalibration hypothesis by examining the effect of implicit beliefs about resource availability.
on individual’s likelihood to delay emotional decisions (Experiment 3). Finally, I demonstrate why and how this effect requires individuals to associate mental resources with generating a satisfactory response (Experiment 4).

Importantly, to isolate the decision-focus manipulation, I elected to focus on products that were neutral with respect to emotionality and rationality. That is, to control for idiosyncratic differences in the disposition of the product, the product category used in each study was pretested to be neither emotionally or rationally dominant (see Appendix D).

**Experiment 1**

I conducted an initial experiment to test my hypothesis that an emotional focus elicits greater choice delay than does a rational focus. To test this idea, I exposed all individuals to the same choice—specifically, whether to decide to select a granola bar. Critically, however, I manipulated individuals’ decision focus by altering whether they were exposed to ads pretested to increase the salience of emotional, rational, or neutral information. Importantly, then, the key measure was individuals’ likelihood to engage in versus postpone the decision. I expected that those in the emotional-focus condition would engage in greater choice delay than would those in the rational condition. Furthermore, because an emotional focus should increase the perceived resource demand of the choice, I expected that those in the emotional-focus condition would engage in greater choice delay than would those in the neutral (i.e., control) condition as well.

**Method**

**Participants and design.** Ninety undergraduates (51% Male; \(M_{\text{age}} = 20.47\)) completed a study on print advertisements. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three decision-focus conditions (emotional, rational, or control).
**Procedure.** Following the study welcome, participants were told that a consumer packaged goods company, whose name was ostensibly concealed for privacy purposes, was seeking feedback on print advertisements. All participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three granola bar advertisements. Importantly, across all conditions the image on the advertisement remained the same. However, as a manipulation of decision focus, I altered the slogan printed on the ad. This manipulation is consistent with prior research that has manipulated the emotional or rational focus of a decision by altering an advertisement’s slogan (see Cian, Krishna, & Schwarz, 2015). Specifically, participants received an ad for a granola bar that read either “To refuel your dreams” (*emotional-focus* condition), “To refuel your energy” (*rational-focus* condition), or “To refuel” (*control* condition) and were asked to take some time to review the ad (see Appendix E for stimuli).12

Importantly, after viewing the ad, all participants were told that as a thank you for their time, they would be receiving a granola bar. Participants were asked what they would like to do—make a granola bar choice *now* or make a granola bar choice *later*. For those who opted to make a choice now, they were presented with the granola bar options on a subsequent screen. For those who opted to make a choice later, they were presented with the granola bar options at the end of the study. Importantly, then, only the timing of the decision varied, as it was clear to participants that the decision would be made.

12 To ensure the efficacy of the decision focus manipulation, the advertisements were submitted to a pretest (*N* = 40) in which participants were randomly assigned to receive either the emotional, rational, or control ad prior to responding to the same scale item, “What comes to mind when viewing the advertisement?” on a series of differing scale anchors: 1 – *Thoughts* to 9 – *Feelings*, 1 – *Cognitions* to 9 – *Emotions*, 1 – *Reasons* to 9 – *Intuitions*. Responses were averaged (*α* = .82), such that higher values indicated greater emotionality (vs. rationality). A series of one-sample t-tests compared the decision focus conditions to the midpoint of the scale (5), and the analyses indicated that the emotional focus (*M* = 5.67, *SD* = .97) was significantly higher than the midpoint (*t*(14) =2.67, *p* = .018), while the rational focus (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = 1.19) and control (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = 1.46) were significantly lower than the midpoint.
Finally, consistent with the cover story, participants evaluated the advertisement on a series of items. Following the conclusion of the study, participants received their chosen granola bar, were debriefed, and thanked for their time.

**Results**

The choice data were analyzed via a chi-square test to analyze potential differences in delay (0 = *make choice*, 1 = *delay choice*) as a function of decision focus (0 = *control*, 1 = *rational*, 2 = *emotional*). As expected, the analysis revealed a significant difference in delay based on decision focus ($\chi^2 (2, N = 90) = 7.78, p = .020$) (see Figure 5). Follow up analyses revealed that those in the emotion-focus condition were much more likely to delay choice (60%) compared to those in the rational-focus (26.67% [$\chi^2 (1, N = 60) = 6.79, p = .009$]) or control (33.33% [$\chi^2 (1, N = 60) = 4.29, p = .038$]) conditions, which did not differ from one another ($p > .57$).

**Figure 5.** Choice delay as a function of decision focus in Experiment 1.
Discussion

The findings of Experiment 1 offer initial evidence that individuals are more likely to delay emotionally-focused decisions—here, an actual consumption experience. Indeed, across conditions, participants responded to the same choice. However, those in the emotion-focused condition were significantly more likely to delay the choice than were those in the rational-focused condition as well as those in the control condition. This latter effect is especially interesting as it provides initial evidence that an emotional focus increases individuals’ likelihood to engage in delay.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, I directly tested the lay belief proposed to underlie the effect between emotionally-focused decisions and choice delay. That is, while research has reliability demonstrated that emotional decisions are less resource demanding (see Pham, 2007); I contend that individuals paradoxically perceive emotional decisions to be more resource demanding. As noted, this prediction is consistent with work demonstrating the tendency for individuals to overestimate the impact and duration of emotions on future events (e.g., Lowenstein & Schkade, 1999; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Thus, I contend that individuals will also be more likely to overestimate the amount of resources necessary to make a current, emotionally-focused (vs. rationally-focused) decision.

Experiment 2a

I conducted an initial experiment to test the extent to which individuals delay emotion-focused decisions due to a greater perceived drain to their mental resources.
Method

Participants and design. One hundred and forty (56% Female; $M_{age} = 36.14$) participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on decision making. Participants were randomly assigned to a decision focus condition ($emotional$, $rational$, or control) prior to completing an assessment of the perceived resource drain associated with making a decision.

Procedure. Following the study welcome, all participants were told that the study was about tea. Following this information, I manipulated the focus of the decision by instructing participants to focus on either their feelings ($emotional$-focus condition) or thoughts ($rational$-focus condition) in relation to tea (adapted from Mikles et al., 2010, 2011).

I then asked participants to imagine that they were shopping at a grocery store and that they came upon the tea aisle and noticed a few options available for purchase. Prior to making a purchasing decision, participants responded to a series of questions regarding the tea scenario. Specifically, participants responded to a series of items that assessed the perceived resource drain associated with making a decision: “How much do you anticipate feeling exhausted of your mental resources after considering this decision?” “How much do you anticipate your ability to concentrate being negatively impacted after considering this decision?” “How depleted do you anticipate feeling after considering this decision?” “How mentally exhausted do you anticipate feeling after considering this decision?” “How much do you anticipate feeling drained of your mental resources after considering this decision?” “How cognitively drained do you anticipate feeling after considering this decision?” Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at 1 – Not at all to 9 – Very. Responses across items were averaged ($\alpha = .71$), such that higher values indicated a greater perceived resource drain.
Participants were then asked to make a choice to decide whether or not to purchase tea now or decide whether or not to purchase tea later. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time.

**Results**

**Choice delay.** Participants’ choice was coded as 0 = *decide now* or 1 = *decide later*. These data were then submitted to a chi-square test to compare the difference in delay as a function of decision focus (0 = *control*, 1 = *rational*, and 2 = *emotional*). The analysis revealed a significant difference in choice delay based on the decision focus ($\chi^2 (2, N = 140) = 15.28, p < .001$). Those in the emotional-focus condition (28.57%) were much more likely to delay choice than those in the rational-focus (6.12%; $\chi^2 (1, N = 91) = 8.28, p = .004$) or control (4.08%; $\chi^2 (1, N = 91) = 10.42, p = .001$) conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p > .64$).

**Perceived resource drain.** The perceived resource drain index was submitted to an ANOVA, with decision focus as the independent variable. The analysis revealed a significant effect of decision focus ($F(2,137) = 6.07, p = .003$); consistent with predictions, those in the emotional-focus condition anticipated a greater resource drain from making a choice ($M = 5.10, SD = 1.99$) than did those in the rational-focus ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.23$) and control ($M = 4.37, SD = .92$) conditions ($ps < .039$), which did not differ from each other ($p > .90$).

**Mediation analyses.** I used bootstrapping procedures to assess the extent to which the effect of an emotional focus on choice delay is driven by the perceived resource drain of the decision (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). Results confirm a significant mediating pathway through the perceived resource drain index (95% CI: .027, .72; see Figure 6 for full path analysis).
Figure 6. Path analysis in Experiment 2a. Note: Values in parentheses indicate standardized beta coefficients before controlling for other variables in the model. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Experiment 2b

Experiment 2b sought to extend the findings of Experiment 2a by examining the rationale surrounding the desire to delay emotionally-focused decisions. Specifically, I examined the extent to which an insufficiency of resources influences one’s perceived ability to make a satisfactory decision. Indeed, research has demonstrated the role of satisfaction for decision postponement, showing that individuals are more likely to postpone decision making when they do not anticipate a satisfactory decision (Valenzuela, Dhar, & Zettelmeyer, 2009; see also Botti & McGill, 2011). Here, examining the role of anticipated satisfaction allows us to offer clarity into why a perceived insufficiency of resources leads individuals to delay decisions. I predict that emotionally-focused decisions elicit a perceived deficiency of resources by which to make a satisfactory choice, which leads individuals to delay decision making.

Method

Participants and design. One hundred and forty-six (54% Female; $M_{age} = 37.53$) participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on decision making. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three decision focus conditions

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(emotional, rational, or control) before completing assessments of perceived resource drain and satisfaction.

**Procedure.** After an initial welcome to the study, participants were told that the decision-making study was about fitness centers. I then randomly assigned participants to one of three decision focus conditions: emotional, rational, or control. Specifically, those in the emotional and rational conditions were asked to rate their feelings (emotional-focus condition) or thoughts (rational-focus condition) about fitness centers on a series of items that were either emotionally or rationally-laden (see Appendix F for items). Importantly, however, participants responded to each of the items on 5-point scales anchored at 1 – Somewhat agree to 5 – Completely agree, which were intentionally biased to promote agreement with the statements (Clarkson, Janiszewski, & Cinelli, 2013; Salancik, 1974; Salancik, & Conway, 1975; Tormala & DeSensi, 2008; see Petrocelli, Martin, & Li, 2010). Those in the control condition did not respond to any scale items relating to fitness centers and were automatically forwarded to the next portion of the study.

Following the focus manipulation, all participants were asked to imagine that they had moved to a new area and were looking for a workout spot. They were told that they had spent some time visiting different gyms in the area, since all the fitness centers were new to them, and that they had narrowed it down to a few gyms to a pick from. Following this scenario, I again asked participants to rate how draining they anticipated making a decision to be (see Experiment 2a for items). Responses across items were averaged (α = .79), such that higher values indicated a greater perceived resource drain.

Upon completing the perceived resource drain assessment, participants responded to a series of items designed to assess their anticipated level of satisfaction with coming to a decision
WHY WE DECIDE NOT TO DECIDE

(adapted from Botti & McGill, 2011): “How satisfied do you anticipate feeling after making this decision?” “How content do you anticipate feeling after making this decision?” “How happy do you anticipate feeling after making this decision? How unsatisfied do you anticipate feeling after making this decision?” (reverse-scored) Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at 1 – Not at all to 9 – Very, and averaged (α = .85), such that higher values indicated a greater anticipated satisfaction.

Following the resource drain and satisfaction measures, participants were asked return to the fitness center scenario. Participants were asked to make a choice between deciding which gym to join now or deciding which gym to join later. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

Choice delay. Participants’ choice was coded as 0 = decide now or 1 = decide later. These data were then submitted to a chi-square test to compare the difference in delay as a function of the decision focus (0 = control, 1 = rational, and 2 = emotional). The analysis revealed a significant difference in choice delay based on decision focus ($\chi^2 (2, N = 146) = 10.45, p = .005$). Those in the emotional-focus condition (28%) were much more likely to delay choice than those in the rational-focus (5.88%; $[\chi^2 (1, N = 101) = 8.82, p = .003]$) or control (11.11%; $[\chi^2 (1, N = 95) = 4.22, p = .040]$) conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p > .35$).

Perceived resource drain. The perceived resource drain index was submitted to an ANOVA, with decision focus as the independent variable. The analysis revealed a significant effect of decision focus ($F(2,143) = 4.67, p = .011$), such that those in the emotional-focus condition anticipated a greater resource drain from making a choice ($M = 3.90, SD = 1.58$) than
did those in the rational-focus ($M = 3.22, SD = 1.36$) or control ($M = 3.10, SD = 1.23$) conditions ($ps < .041$), which did not differ from each other ($p > .90$).

**Anticipated satisfaction.** The anticipated satisfaction index was submitted to an ANOVA, with decision focus as the independent variable. The analysis revealed a significant effect of decision focus ($F(2,143) = 5.21, p = .007$), such that those in the emotional-focus condition anticipated making a less satisfactory choice ($M = 6.58, SD = 1.78$) than did those in the rational-focus ($M = 7.41, SD = 1.32$) or control ($M = 7.46, SD = 1.38$) conditions ($ps < .018$), which did not differ from each other ($p > .99$).

**Mediation analyses.** I conducted a serial mediation analysis to test the extent to which the perceived drain of emotional decisions impacted choice delay by altering individuals’ perceived resource demand and, thus, perceptions of achieving a satisfactory choice. I submitted the data to a serial mediation model (Model 6; Hayes, 2013), which analyzed the path from decision focus to choice delay through perceived resource drain and anticipated satisfaction. Results showed that the effect of decision focus on choice delay was mediated by perceptions of resource drain and anticipated satisfaction (95% CI: .001, .17; see Figure7 for full path analysis). Furthermore, consistent with Experiment 2a, the mediating path of decision focus to choice delay solely through perceived resource drain remained significant (95% CI: .010, .46); however, the mediating path of decision focus to choice delay solely through anticipated satisfaction was not significant (95% CI: -.006, .62). Finally, when the order of the mediators were reversed, the serial mediation model was not significant. (95% CI:-.001, .13).
Figure 7. Path analysis in Experiment 2b. Note: Values in parentheses indicate standardized beta coefficients before controlling for other variables in the model. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Discussion

The findings of Experiment 2 offer robust support for the lay beliefs surrounding emotionally-focused decisions. These findings reveal that (i) individuals perceive emotional decisions as more draining than rational decisions, that (ii) this perceived drain of resources led individuals to reduce the extent to which they believed they were able to make a satisfactory decision, and (iii) the serial model predicted the effect of decision focus on choice delay through perceived resource drain and anticipated satisfaction. Thus, individuals were more likely to delay emotional decisions as a means of managing perceptions of insufficient mental resources, as these perceptions impacted individuals’ ability to generate a satisfactory decision.

Experiment 3

Experiment 2 demonstrated that individuals delay emotionally-focused decisions because they perceive them as requiring more resources by which to arrive at a satisfactory choice. Importantly, if the findings of Experiment 2 hold true, then the effect should only occur for individuals who naturally believe that they have a limited (vs. unlimited) storehouse of resources available at any one time. Thus, in Experiment 3, I offer an alternative test of the mechanism by examining the role of willpower beliefs.
Indeed, research has demonstrated that individuals vary in the extent to which they believe that their ability to regulate behavior (i.e., willpower; Baumeister, 2002; see Baumeister & Tierney, 2011) is a limited (vs. unlimited) resource (Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010; see also Mukhopadhyay & Johar, 2005). That is, individuals differ in their lay theories regarding the extent to which they believe that their resources are relatively exhaustible (limited theory) or that their resources are relatively inexhaustible (unlimited theory). Importantly, those who endorse an unlimited willpower theory have been shown to be relatively immune to resource depletion relative to those who endorse a limited willpower theory (Job et al., 2010)—as the former individuals perceive themselves as naturally possessing more resources (Clarkson et al., 2016).

Following this logic, I contend that resource perceptions of emotionally-focused decisions should only affect individuals who naturally perceive that they have an insufficiency of resources (i.e., limited theorists). Said differently, given that an anticipated drain of resources is associated with emotional decisions, individuals should only delay these decisions when they naturally believe that their resources can be drained (i.e., limited theorists). Thus, I expect emotionally-focused decisions to impact choice delay for those who endorse a limited (vs. unlimited) willpower theory.

Method

Participants and design. One hundred participants (51% Male; $M_{age} = 37.23$) were recruited through Mechanical Turk to complete a study on decision making. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three decision focus conditions (emotional, rational, or control) before completing the Implicit Theories about Willpower Scale (Job et al., 2010).

Procedure. Following an introduction to the study, participants were told the decision-making study was about coffee. As in Experiment 2, participants were assigned to one of three
decision focus conditions: emotional, rational, or control. Specifically, those in the *emotional-focus* condition were asked to describe their *feelings* about purchasing coffee, while those in the *rational-focus* condition were asked to describe their *thoughts* about coffee on a series of items that were intentionally biased to promote either agreement with these statements (see Appendix G for exact wording). Again, those in the *control* condition did not receive a focus manipulation and were automatically forwarded to the next portion of the study. All participants were then asked to imagine that they were shopping for coffee and noticed several options available. Participants were instructed to think about the coffee scenario and asked to make a choice between deciding on whether or not to purchase coffee *now* or whether or not to purchase coffee *later*.

Following a series of filler questions, participants completed the Implicit Theories about Willpower Scale (Job et al., 2010) to index participants’ willpower theories. Sample items include: “Your mental stamina fuels itself,” “Even after strenuous mental exertion, you can continue doing more of it,” and “Strenuous mental activity exhausts your resources, which you need to refuel afterwards” (reverse-scored). Responses were obtained on 6-point scales anchored from 1 – *Completely disagree* to 6 – *Completely agree* and averaged (six items; $\alpha = .85$) such that higher values indicated greater endorsement of willpower capacity as relatively unlimited.

Participants then completed a series of demographic questions, were debriefed, and thanked for their time.

**Results**

The choice data (0 = *decide now*, 1 = *decide later*) were submitted to a hierarchical logistic regression, with decision focus (0 = *control*, 1 = *rational*, 2 = *emotional*) and willpower theory (continuous, mean-centered) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction
in the second step (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Replicating the prior two studies, the analysis revealed a main effect of decision focus ($\beta = .84$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 7.30$, $p = .007$) and, as expected, no main effect of willpower theory ($p > .98$). Importantly, the results revealed a significant decision focus $\times$ willpower theory interaction ($\beta = -.93$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 5.26$, $p = .022$; see Figure 8). Consistent with expectations, limited theorists (+1 SD) were significantly more likely to delay choice in the emotional-focus condition, compared to both the rational-focus ($\beta = 1.85$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 6.05$, $p = .014$) or control ($\beta = 1.70$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 8.56$, $p = .003$) conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p > .30$). For unlimited theorists (-1 SD), there was no difference in choice delay based on the focus of the decision ($ps > .83$).

**Figure 8.** Choice delay as a function of decision focus and willpower theories in Experiment 3.

**Discussion**

The findings of Experiment 3 offer an alternative means by which to test the robustness
of the proposed lay beliefs associated with emotionally-focused decisions. Here, I examined the role of willpower theories and found that the effect of an emotional focus on choice delay is bound to those who naturally perceive they have a limited (vs. limited) amount of resources. That is, individuals delayed emotionally-focused decisions when they implicitly believe they have an insufficiency of resources (i.e., limited theorists). Importantly, these findings only corroborate those of Experiment 2, which demonstrated that perceptions of resource drain underlie the effect of emotionality on choice delay. Together, then, the findings of Experiments 2 and 3 offer converging means by which to demonstrate a resource-based account for the delay of emotionally-focused decisions.

**Experiment 4**

Experiments 2 and 3 offered support for my hypothesis that individuals perceive emotionally-focused decisions as draining of resources. In the final experiment, I sought to bolster support for the underlying process by directly manipulating the lay theory that a sufficiency of mental resources is critical to generating a satisfactory decision. Specifically, I contend that individuals should only delay emotionally-focused decisions when they perceive that many resources are required to make a satisfactory choice; when they perceive that few resources are required to make a satisfactory choice, I expect individuals to decrease the extent to which they delay emotional decisions.

**Method**

**Participants and design.** One hundred and twenty-eight participants (62% Female; $M_{age} = 35.15$) on Mechanical Turk completed a study on consumer decision-making. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three lay theory conditions (*many resources, few resources*, or *control*) and one of two decision focus conditions (*emotional* or *rational*).
Procedure. After being welcomed to the study, participants were informed of the researchers’ interests in gauging their reactions to recent research findings ostensibly published in a top-tier research journal. This information constituted my manipulation of the lay theory between the number of resources necessary to arrive at a quality decision (see Clarkson, Valente, Leone, & Tormala, 2013). In both conditions, participants were told:

We as decision makers have long known that mental resources (i.e., the ability to focus and concentrate) are important to the quality of decisions that people make. However, common beliefs and intuition are very unclear on how those resources affect decision quality – and, in fact, are contradictory. For instance, both the belief that *lots of resources* and *minimal levels of resources* are necessary to generate a satisfactory response are viewed as common knowledge, despite their clear contradiction. Importantly, those in the *few resources* condition participants were additionally told:

While both beliefs have intuitive appeal, extensive research within decision making shows time and again that individuals should expend a *minimal* amount of resources to arrive at a decision they are happy with and in fact expending *too many resources* can actually be *harmful* (e.g., over-thinking).

While those in the *many resources* condition were additionally told:

While both beliefs have intuitive appeal, extensive research within decision making shows time and again that individuals should expend a *considerable* amount of resources to arrive at a decision they are happy with and in fact expending *too few resources* can actually be *harmful* (e.g., under-thinking).

Those in the *control* condition did not receive a lay theory manipulation and were automatically forwarded to the next portion of the study.
Following the lay theory manipulation, all participants were told that the remaining portion of the study was related to coffee. As in Experiment 2a, I manipulated the focus of the decision by instructing participants to focus on either their feelings (emotional-focused condition) or thoughts (rational-focus condition) related to coffee (adapted from Mikles et al., 2010, 2011).

I then had all participants consider the same scenario used in Experiment 3. Again, participants were asked to imagine that they were shopping for coffee and noticed a few options available. I then asked participants to make a choice between deciding whether or not to purchase coffee now or deciding whether or not to purchase coffee later.

All participants were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

The choice data (0 = decide now, 1 = decide later) were submitted to a hierarchical logistic regression with decision focus (0 = rational, 1 = emotional) and lay theory (0 = control, 1 = many resources, 2 = few resources) as main effect predictors in the first step and their interaction in the second step (Cohen et al., 2003). As expected, the analysis revealed a significant main effect of decision focus ($\beta = 2.38$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 20.24$, $p < .001$) and no effect of lay theory ($p > .61$). Importantly, the analysis revealed a significant decision focus $\times$ lay theory interaction ($\beta = -1.60$, Wald’s $\chi^2 = 4.07$, $p = .044$; see Figure 9).
**Figure 9.** Choice delay as a function of decision focus and lay theory (as requiring *few* or *many* resources to make a satisfactory decision) in Experiment 4.

Consistent with expectations, follow-up analyses revealed that individuals were more likely to delay emotionally-focused decisions when it was presumed that a greater number of mental resources were required to arrive at a satisfactory choice relative to those who believed that few mental resources were required to make a satisfactory choice ($F(1, 77) = 9.49$, $p = .003$). Importantly, the control condition (i.e., no lay theory manipulation) aligned with the *many resources* condition, such that (i) those in the control condition were just as likely to delay emotional decisions compared to those who perceived that many resources were required to achieve a satisfactory decision ($p > .11$) and (ii) were *more* likely to delay emotional decisions compared to those who believed few resources were required to make a satisfactory decision ($F(1, 80) = 30.95$, $p < .001$). For rationally-focused decisions, no significant differences in choice delay were observed across lay theory conditions ($ps > .094$).
When viewed differently, those who were told that *many* resources were required to achieve a satisfactory choice showed a significant difference in choice delay as a function of decision focus ($\chi^2 (1, N = 44) = 4.24, p = .039$), such that individuals were more (vs. less) likely to delay decisions when emotionally (vs. rationally) focused. Alternatively, those who were told that *few* resources were required to achieve a satisfactory choice did not reveal a significant difference in choice delay as a function of decision focus ($p > .096$). Thus, only when individuals perceive that more (vs. less) resources are required to achieve a satisfactory decision did the focus of the decision as emotional (vs. rational) lead individuals to delay choice.

Finally, a chi-square analysis of the control condition (i.e., no lay theory manipulation) and decision focus, replicated the findings of Experiments 1—3, such that participants were more likely to delay emotionally-focused (vs. rational-focused) decisions ($\chi^2 (1, N = 47) = 20.05, p < .001$).

**Discussion**

The findings of Experiment 4 offer robust support for the perceived drain of emotionally-focused decisions. Indeed, when the resource demand associated with satisfactory decisions was expected to be *high*, individuals delayed decisions with an emotional focus. However, by experimentally altering the lay theory such that the resource demand associated with satisfactory decisions was expected to be *low*, individuals were less likely to delay decisions with an emotional focus. Thus, by altering the lay theory surrounding the resource requirement associated with satisfactory decision-making, I am able to directly attenuate the effect of emotionally-focused decisions on choice delay.
WHY WE DECIDE NOT TO DECIDE

General Discussion

Though prior research demonstrates the efficiency and low resource demand of emotionally-focused (vs. rational-focused) decisions (Pham, 2007), individuals appear to hold a belief that directly opposes these findings. That is, individuals perceive emotional decisions to be more resource demanding than rational decisions. Across four experiments, individuals were consistently more likely to delay emotionally-focused (relative to rationally-focused) decisions due to the perceived mental drain of emotional decisions. Importantly, this effect was shown to occur for the same choice—as only individuals’ focus on emotional versus rational information was varied. Additionally, this finding occurred across a host of product categories (e.g., granola, tea, fitness centers, coffee) and manipulations of decision focus.

Critically, the findings stem from individuals’ miscalibration of the mental drain of emotional decisions. For instance, emotional decisions were shown to be perceived as more resource demanding than were rational decisions, and this perception mediated participants’ subsequent choice to delay decision-making (Experiment 2). Furthermore, this effect of emotional decisions on choice delay occurred only for those individuals who believe their resources are limited; for those individuals who believe their resources are unlimited, emotional decisions had no effect on choice delay (Experiment 3). Collectively, then, these findings offer converging support for the argument that individuals do indeed perceive emotional decisions as more—rather than less—resource demanding, and this miscalibrated perception increases choice delay.

Importantly, these findings also offer insight into why individuals’ perceptions of resource demand heighten the decision to delay emotional decisions—specifically, that a perceived insufficiency of resources undermines individuals’ ability to make satisfactory choices.
(see Experiment 2b). Moreover, this assumption was further supported by manipulating individuals’ lay belief regarding the association between mental resources and the ability to generate satisfactory decisions. Specifically, this effect held only for those who believed mental resources are necessary to generate a satisfactory decision; for those who believed mental resources are not necessary to generate a satisfactory decision, the effect of emotional focus on choice delay attenuated (Experiment 4). In short, then, when individuals did not believe they had the resources to make a satisfactory decision, they delayed the choice—a belief naturally-induced by emotional decisions.

I find this effect of satisfaction on individuals’ desire to postpone mentally draining decisions especially intriguing given we know so little about the role of perceived mental resources on satisfaction. That is, these findings suggest that individuals not only hold to a lay belief that insufficient resources result in less satisfactory choices, but they are more likely to postpone or delay choices as a result of this lay belief. This finding, then, not only highlights why emotional decisions—and the misperception of the mental resources associated with them—heighten choice delay, but it also broadens our understanding of the necessity of perceived resource sufficiency for satisfactory decision-making.

Finally, it is intriguing that individuals do not appear to learn from actual experience when making emotionally-focused decisions. That is, though individuals perceive emotional decisions as more resource draining, research has reliability demonstrated the opposite. Therefore, when individuals do make emotional decisions, it seems intuitive that they would adjust their perceptions of resource demand over time to align with reality. While certainly reasonable, prior research on affective forecasting demonstrates that individuals do not learn from forecasting errors (Meyvis, Ratner, & Levav, 2010; see also Wilson, Meyers, & Gilbert,
The dominant explanation for this belief persistence is that individuals tend to alter the recall of the actual event to match their misperception (Mavis et al., 2010; see also Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975). Thus, individuals’ persist in their belief that emotional decisions are more—rather than less—resource demanding because they selectively alter their experiential recall to match their misperception.

**Contributions**

The present findings suggest that individuals are more likely to postpone emotional decisions, a finding that offers contributions to many domains. For instance, this work has implications for persuasive appeals used in advertising, retailing and sales. That is, while the focus of the decision can undoubtedly stem from an individuals’ natural disposition (see Pacini & Epstein, 1999), it can be situationally altered in a variety of ways. For instance, advertisements often alter the focus of the ad by altering the slogan (see Experiment 1), image, or story. Additionally, sales associates commonly alter the decision focus by having customers focus on their feelings when evaluating a purchase decision by saying things such as “How does this make you feel?” or “Think about all the memories you’ll make by purchasing this.” While there may be strong advantages to emotionality in persuasion (e.g., Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991), the findings of this work demonstrate a cautionary tale to those inducing (whether directly or indirectly) an emotional focus, as it could likely lead customers to postpone decision making.

Additionally, this work offers insight into the ever-prevalent issue of abandoned shopping carts (i.e., when consumers place items in a shopping cart but do not end up purchasing the items). This work speaks to how retailers might be able to combat this problem. For one, retailers could alter the focus of decision (e.g., slogans, pop-up ads, images), as to induce a rational focus. Again, as we’ve demonstrated here, a rational focus is less likely to elicit the negative associates
with mental resources and decision making. Alternatively, retailers could implement programs that facilitate a return (e.g., a “wishlist”) for when consumers do delay decisions. This would allow customers to postpone decisions, reevaluating the purchase decision at a later time.

Finally, while the present research demonstrates that emotionally-focused decisions lead individuals to delay decisions, emotionality should not always induce the desire to postpone (see Experiment 4). As this research demonstrates, consumers hold lay beliefs between mental resources and satisfaction and this is important because there should be certain conditions where these lay theories are more or less accessible or relevant. One instance in which these lay beliefs might be less relevant is when the consumer is brand loyal. Given that a loyal consumer is presumed to have experience with a brand, the individual should be less likely to associate a satisfactory decision with a drain of mental resources. That is, if the consumer is already satisfied with the brand, then making a decision to purchase the brand again (even in new domains), should not elicit an anticipated drain of resources. Thus, I predict that emotional appeals would work better for established brands, as it should attenuate the resource-demand—satisfaction link, helping to bypass some of the negative associations of emotionality. However, again, I would caution the use of emotional appeals for new brands or products.

**Concluding Remarks**

Though research has reliability demonstrated that emotional decisions require relatively less mental resources to make a decision, I contend that individuals perceptions do not align with reality. Consistent with this possibility, I demonstrate that individuals are more likely to delay emotional (vs. rational) decisions. Moreover, this effect is: (i) due to the perception that emotional decisions require a greater number of mental resources to arrive at choice, (ii) bounded to those who believe their resources are limited, and (iii) dependent on individuals’ lay
theory regarding the resource demands of emotional decisions for satisfactory decision making. Consequently, these findings offer critical insight into the miscalibration associated with perceptions of emotional decisions and the consequence of this miscalibration for individuals choice to delay (versus engage in) the decision-making process.
Dissertation Conclusion

Overall, this research sheds light onto how consumers cope with, manage, and resolve various aversive states related to decision making. Specifically, I investigated various psychological and contextual factors that prompt decision makers to engage in decision avoidance as a means of resolving the aversive nature of decisions. I demonstrated how the fundamental desire for cognitive closure elicits a general aversion toward decision making, motivating individuals to “sidestep” decisions. Furthermore, I revealed how the perspective taken on a decision (i.e., an emotional or rational focus) elicits the desire to postpone decision making. Importantly, these bodies of work demonstrate the multiple ways in which individuals can avoid decisions (i.e., sidestepping, postponing), while shedding light onto the multiple factors (i.e., cognitive closure, emotional decisions) that elicit a general aversion toward decision making.
References


WHY WE DECIDE NOT TO DECIDE


Appendices

Appendix A. Uncategorized (i.e., *high bothersome*) and categorized (i.e., *low bothersome*) restaurant menus used in Experiment 3a of Essay 1.

**Uncategorized Menu**

**Catagorized Menu**

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**Appetizers**

- Angry Mac and Cheese – Hot Melt and jalapeno cheese sauce $9
- Spicy Garlic Shrimp – Il chili garlic butter over jiggled baguette $11

**Salads**

- Iceberg Wedge – Tomato, bacon, Dallmable cheese and bleu cheese dressing $11
- Crepe Caesar – Parmesan and butters dressing $11
- Blackened Chicken Salad – Chopped lettuce, red pepper, corn, tomato, black beans, avocado, shredded cheddar and tortilla strips tossed in honey-lime vinaigrette $13

**Entrées**

- Tempura Shrimp – Jalapeno corn mix, camaerized onion, guacamole, roasted tomato salsa and guacamole $22
- Squash Wellington – Butternut squash and mushroom dough wrapped in filo pastry over lemons $16
- Smoked Burger – Cheddar, parmesan, applewood bacon, fried egg, sweet onion relish and black pepper mayo $13
- Smothered Chicken – Grilled chicken breast topped with houmasted, bacon, mushroom, scallions, cheddar and mozzarella served with smoked cheddar mashed potatoes and sauteed green beans $17

**Sides**

- Loaded Baked Potato – Creamy gold Yukon Gold potato with butter, cheddar cheese, and bacon $3
- Seasoned Rice – White rice with sautéed onion and garlic $3
- Broccoli Cheese Casserole – Broccoli is mixed with a flavorful cheese sauce, topped with buttered bread crumbs $3
- French Fries – Crispy, deep-fried potatoes $2

**Desserts**

- Mini Chocolate Soufflé – Served warm with vanilla ice cream $9
- S'mores Brownie – Chocolate brownie with graham cracker crust and roasted marshmallows $7
- Salted Caramel Butter pecan Pudding – Topped with house made whipped cream, chocolate cookies, crumbly and muddled sea salt $7

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*The Standard* Prime: Smooth Burger + French Fries $15
Appendix B. Vertical (i.e., *high bothersome*) and horizontal (i.e., *low bothersome*) video layouts used in Experiment 3b of Essay 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical Layout</th>
<th>Horizontal Layout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog’s struggle</td>
<td>Dog’s struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jingle guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grocery cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music twins</td>
<td>Music twins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The strawberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingle guy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strawberries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery cake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Horn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix C.** Visual flow of vacation packages used in the comparative choices of Experiment 5 in Essay 1.

### Choice 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Oasis Shore Beach Resort</strong></th>
<th><strong>The European Sampler</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With its blissful ambience of laid-back cool and uninhibited revelry, the Oasis Shore Beach Resort epitomizes the free-spirited personality that is big on warmth and charm.</td>
<td>As the name suggests, this vacation is a sample of some of major highlights of Europe. Here sightseeing with a local guide includes all the highlights, even a ride up to the second floor of the Eiffel Tower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every room is just steps from the beach</td>
<td>London – Guided sightseeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited scuba diving</td>
<td>Heldburg – Walking tour of the Old Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited premium brand drinks</td>
<td>London-Sussex – by high-speed Eurostar train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour room service</td>
<td>Black Forest – Wood carving demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited Beininger Wines</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Canal cruise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lane Spa (services extra)</td>
<td>Paris – Guided sightseeing, ascend the Eiffel Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited fine dining at 7 restaurants</td>
<td>Rhein Cruise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regal Beach Resort</strong></td>
<td>Lucas – Liss Monamour, Swiss chocolate supplies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Choice 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Oasis Shore Beach Resort</strong></th>
<th><strong>The European Sampler</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted the “World’s Most Romantic Resort,” year after year, Regal Beach Resort is set on the most famous beach and is graced by meandering pathways, majestic palms, and cooling Trade winds.</td>
<td>This vacation consists almost entirely of two-night stays in a variety of famous cities and picturesque towns. This package includes guided sightseeing in Amsterdam, a cruise on the Rhine River, an overnight stay in Heldburg, where dinner with beer at a local restaurant has been included, a stop in medieval Rothenburg and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set on the island’s best beach</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Guided sightseeing: Welcome dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exotic Randoval Suites</td>
<td>Venice – Private boat ride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-star, all-suite Mediterranean Village</td>
<td>Hamburg – Dinner with beer at a local restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 bars serving unlimited premium liquors</td>
<td>Neuschwanstein – Visit King Ludwig’s Castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury Ocean Villa one bedroom suites</td>
<td>Lake Maggiore – Stop in the town of Stresa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 sq. ft. conference center &amp; banquet facilities</td>
<td>Munich – Orientation including Masterplaza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler service included in top-tier suites</td>
<td>Lusitaine-Pans – By high-speed TGV train (first-class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Specialty restaurants for unlimited dining</td>
<td>Innsbruck – Walk through Old Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re Lane Spa (optional)</td>
<td>Pans – Guided sightseeing, ascend the Eiffel Tower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D. Product category pre-test results for the focal products used in all experiments of Essay 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 1</td>
<td>Granola</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 2a</td>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 2b</td>
<td>Fitness Centers</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiments 3,4</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Responses were obtained on single item semantic differential scales (1 – *Thoughts* to 9 – *Feelings*, 1 – *Cognitions* to 9 – *Emotions*, 1 – *Reasons* to 9 – *Intuitions*) for the item: “What comes to mind when thinking about [product category]?”
Appendix E. Decision-focus manipulation in Experiment 1 of Essay 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Focus</th>
<th>Rational Focus</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Emotional Focus Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Rational Focus Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Control Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TO REFUEL YOUR DREAMS

TO REFUEL YOUR ENERGY

TO REFUEL
Appendix F. Decision-focus items used the biased-scale manipulation in Experiment 2b of Essay 2.

**Decision Focus Manipulation: Scale Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Rational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often use my emotions when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I often use my thoughts when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself becoming sentimental when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I find myself becoming rational when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to focus on my feelings when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I tend to focus on the details when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself becoming emotionally engaged when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I find myself becoming rationally engaged when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel emotionally focused when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I feel rationally focused when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rely on intuitions when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I rely on logic when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My level of involvement when selecting a gym can be described as passionate.</td>
<td>My level of involvement when selecting a gym can be described as logical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get emotionally involved when selecting a gym.</td>
<td>I get rationally involved when selecting a gym.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G. Decision-focus scale items used for the coffee scenario in Experiment 3 of Essay 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Focus Manipulation: Scale Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often use my emotions when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself becoming sentimental when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to focus on my feelings when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself becoming emotionally engaged when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel emotionally focused when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rely on intuitions when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My level of involvement when purchasing coffee can be described as passionate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get emotionally involved when purchasing coffee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>