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The powerful select, the powerless reject: Power's influence in decision strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of power on consumer decision strategies. It proposes that high power directs consumers' attention to options' positive features, making choosing a more preferred strategy than rejecting, whereas low power shifts consumers' focus to negative features, making rejecting a more preferred strategy than choosing. Two studies using different manipulations of power provide consistent support for this effect. The results also indicate that consumers in a state of high power are more satisfied with their choices when they adopt a choosing strategy than when they adopt a rejecting strategy, whereas the opposite is true for consumers in a state of low power. In addition, study 2 shows that the previous effects are reduced when consumers' sense of responsibility is made salient.

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1. Introduction

When deciding among several alternatives, consumers may proceed by choosing (selecting, including) the most attractive option, or they may adopt a strategy of rejecting (eliminating, excluding) the unattractive options. The decision strategy of selection versus rejection has important consequences for the (a) type of product chosen (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Shafir, 1993), (b) number of chosen products (Huber, Neale, & Northcraft, 1987; Levin, Schreiber, Lauriola, & Gaeth, 2002; Park, Jun, & MacInnis, 2000), (c) accuracy of a decision (Coombs, Donnell, and Kirk, 1978; Payne, 1976; Yaniv & Schul, 1997), and (d) perceived difficulty of a decision (Nagpal & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Park et al., 2000).

While a great deal of research focuses on the consequences of framing a decision as either a select task or a reject task, surprisingly little is known about the circumstances under which consumers are more inclined to choose versus reject. The present research seeks to address this gap by examining the key role of consumers' psychological state of power in determining their preferred decision strategy.

Power is one of the most pervasive psychological forces in everyday life (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Russell, 1938). A person may feel powerful when interacting with a subordinate or when being

solicited for her expert opinion, but may feel powerless when interacting with her boss or being evaluated by her peers. In a consumption situation, subjective feelings of power may arise from relatively stable sources such as one's status and social class (Henry, 2005), or from more contextual sources. For example, a consumer may feel powerless when faced with a critical product or service failure, such as a canceled flight or a botched-up medical procedure (Gelbrich, 2010). Conversely, a consumer may experience a greater sense of power when in a position to influence an important company decision. For example, Threadless, a Chicago-based fashion company, allows its customers to determine which specific design ideas will eventually be marketed (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010). Similarly, M&M's, Mountain Dew, and a number of other customer-focused companies let their customers vote on which new color, new flavor, or new product should be launched (Fuchs et al., 2010). While empowering the customer has become a fashionable catchphrase, the wisdom of such empowerment cannot be fully assessed without a thorough understanding of how power influences consumer decisions at the individual level.

Researchers have recently begun addressing the influence of power on various aspects of consumer behavior (Fuchs et al., 2010; Murali & Pons, 2009; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009; Wathieu et al., 2002). However, no study has yet investigated power's impact on decision strategy. The present research proposes that high power increases consumers' propensity to choose, whereas low power increases their propensity to reject. This occurs because a state of high power directs consumers' attention to options' positive features, whereas a state of low power shifts consumers' focus to negative

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features. Further, this research also finds that powerful consumers are more satisfied with their chosen option after adopting a selection strategy than after adopting a rejection strategy, whereas the reverse is true for powerless consumers. Finally, power's effect on decision strategy and satisfaction is reduced when consumers' sense of responsibility is made salient.

2. Selection-based versus rejection-based decision strategies

The literature on selection versus rejection is organized around three themes. In the first theme, the research question is whether asking consumers to select or reject from a set of options leads to a difference in the final number of product options. The literature indicates a robust effect of selecting versus rejecting; selecting tends to result in a smaller final configuration than rejecting (Huber et al., 1987; Park et al., 2000; Yaniv & Schul, 1997).

In the second theme, the question is whether people look for different types of information when they select versus reject (Ganzach, 1995; Shafir, 1993; Wedell, 1997). This work focuses on whether decision makers look for reasons to reject when rejecting and reasons to select when selecting. Specifically, when respondents are given two options, one with strong negative and positive features (the enriched option) and another with moderate negative and positive features (the impoverished option), the proportion of respondents rejecting the enriched option should be the complement of those selecting it. However, the differential orientation of selecting versus rejecting generates a result untenable under task invariance; the same option can be both chosen and rejected more often. This happens because under a selecting task, respondents look for reasons to choose and under a rejecting task, respondents look for reasons to reject. Since the enriched option provides more reasons for choosing as well as more reasons for rejecting than an impoverished option, it is chosen and rejected more often (Ganzach, 1995; Shafir, 1993; Wedell, 1997).

In the third theme, the literature identifies processing differences between selecting and rejecting. For example, Wedell (1997) contends that decision-makers view selection as more important than rejection because they feel a greater need to justify their choices. Huber et al. (1987) argue that decision-makers employ a stricter decision criterion when selecting relative to rejecting because they consider the task more consequential. Meloy and Russo (2004) echo this idea and suggest that this stronger need to justify selection relative to rejection is seen in the extent to which people distort information. Ganzach (1995) directly addresses the question of importance and finds that selecting is seen by decision-makers as a more important task compared to rejecting. Finally, Levin, Huneke, and Jasper (2000) show that participants who use an inclusion strategy to narrow down a large set of options examine significantly more attributes per alternative than those who use an elimination strategy.

In sum, prior research mainly focuses on the differences in processing and outcomes between decisions framed as select tasks versus reject tasks. However, much less is known about the various conditions that prompt consumers to select versus reject. Shafir (1993) notes that choosing might be the more preferred strategy relative to rejecting; an observation that receives some empirical support in Meloy and Russo (2004). Conversely, Ordóñez, Benson, and Beach (1999) conclude that the norm during screening tasks seems to be to reject the bad options rather than to screen in the good ones. Later investigations, however, reveal that the natural process for screening choice options depends on the characteristics of the decision task. Levin, Prosansky, Heller, and Brunick (2001), for instance, find that people are more likely to favor an inclusion strategy when the task is positive (e.g., hiring employees), while prefer a rejection strategy when the task is negative (e.g., firing employees). In addition, Heller, Levin, and Goransson (2002) show that excluding options is the more natural decision strategy for tasks with a single correct answer, but not for tasks requiring personal

judgments. Moving beyond the task characteristics, the current research examines the influence of power – a consumer characteristic – on the likelihood of adopting a choose strategy versus a reject strategy.

3. Power and selection versus rejection

Power is commonly defined as a person's relative capacity to control valuable resources or administer punishments (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Berdhal, 2007; Keltner et al., 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Valuable resources include not only material resources such as money, food, and jobs, but also social resources such as knowledge, respect, and affection. Although power can be a structural, role-based variable, past evidence indicates that power is also a psychological state. That is, people are capable of forming mental representations of their relative power (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). This subjective sense of power, once activated, can have a significant influence on how people think, feel, and act (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Bargh et al., 1995; Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003; Smith & Trope, 2006). For example, research shows that a high sense of power is associated with greater action orientation (Galinsky et al., 2003), more abstract thinking (Smith & Trope, 2006), and more optimism in the perception of risk (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), whereas a low sense of power is related to more compensatory consumption (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009), and greater difficulties in distinguishing between goal-relevant and goal-irrelevant information (Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & Van Dijk, 2008).

Keltner et al. (2003) propose the approach/inhibition theory of power as a general framework for organizing the various findings in the literature. This theory states that power influences the relative activation of the behavioral approach and inhibition systems – the two fundamental action tendencies that regulate behavior associated with rewards and threats respectively. Specifically, elevated power activates the approach system, whereas reduced power activates the inhibition system. Based on the differential activation of these regulatory systems, this theory predicts that high power will correlate with positive affect, attention to rewards, automatic information processing, and disinhibited behavior, whereas low power will correlate with negative affect, attention to threats and punishments, controlled information processing, and inhibited social behavior (Keltner et al., 2003).

Extending the approach/inhibition theory of power, activation of the behavioral approach system should increase powerful consumers' preference for selection versus rejection. Past research suggests that activation of the behavioral approach system highlights the positive aspects of the options (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). Consumers in a state of high power should favor a decision strategy that accentuates the choice options' positive features, which is more typical of a selection strategy (Shafir, 1993). In contrast, activation of the behavioral inhibition system heightens the perception of threat in the environment. Such focus on threats and the potential downside of a decision is likely to emphasize the choice options' negative features. Since negative features are weighted more heavily under rejection than selection (Shafir, 1993), powerless consumers are likely to prefer rejecting over selecting.

H1. Power will increase consumers' tendency to select, whereas powerlessness will increase their propensity to reject.

A direct implication of H1 is that high power consumers will be more satisfied with their final choice after adopting a selection strategy, whereas low power consumers will be more satisfied with their final choice after adopting a rejecting strategy. This is consistent with Higgins (2006) argument that consumers derive additional value from using proper means of goal pursuit (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Further, Chernev (2009), and Murali and Pons (2007) find that selection is more compatible with a promotion focus, whereas rejection is more

compatible with prevention focus. Since promotion focus is associated with approach-related tendencies (similar to high power), and prevention focus with avoidance-related tendencies (similar to low power), satisfaction will be higher when high-power consumers adopt a selection strategy and low-power consumers adopt a rejection strategy.

H2. High power consumers will be more satisfied with their choice after selecting than after rejecting. The opposite will be true for low power consumers.

4. Study 1

4.1. Participants and procedure

Study 1 was designed to test the general idea that choosing is the preferred decision strategy for high power consumers, whereas rejecting is the preferred strategy for low power consumers. One hundred and fifty undergraduate students (68 women) at a Canadian university participated in exchange for course credit. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 39 ($M = 21.4$, $\sigma = 2.7$).

The study was described as a series of unrelated tasks. First, participants' sense of power was manipulated using a standard priming technique adapted from Galinsky et al. (2003). Specifically, those in the low power condition were asked to write about a particular time or incident in which someone else had control over them. High power participants were asked to write about a particular time or incident in which they had control over another individual. Participants in the control group were asked to write about their day yesterday.

Following the power manipulation, participants answered a nine-point, 12-item mood scale (Smith & Bargh, 2008), indicating how happy, content, joyful, sad, disappointed, depressed, relieved, relaxed, nervous, worried, and tense they felt. The mood questions, which were presented in a random order, were included to test a plausible alternative explanation of the results. Indeed, one might argue that the manipulation of power alters participants' mood, and that the resulting affect rather than the sense of power is what influences consumers' propensity to choose versus reject.

Next, participants were presented with a two-part choice-narrowing task adapted from Levin, Jasper, and Forbes (1998). In part 1, each respondent was given an envelope containing 24 shuffled cards describing 24 brands of cars (brands A through X). The cars varied on four common attributes (reliability, safety, % of Canadian workers, and price). Attribute combinations were similar to those used by Levin et al. (1998). They were selected so that no one option dominated on all four attributes. Respondents were then given the following instructions:

The enclosed envelope contains 24 brands of cars that are described on 4 common attributes. There are two different ways that you could narrow down the options:

1. Inclusion – Look through all the cards. Decide which brands you WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER BUYING. Make a list of these brands on the answer sheet.
2. Exclusion – Look through all the cards. Decide which brands you WOULD NOT SERIOUSLY CONSIDER BUYING. Make a list of these brands on the answer sheet.

After you look through all the cards, choose the way you would like to narrow down the options on the answer sheet. Indicate which method you are using (inclusion or exclusion), and then make your list accordingly.

In part 2, participants were instructed to look over the brands that they had either included or not excluded from further consideration in part 1, and to indicate which brand they would purchase. They then rated how satisfied they were with their final choice (1 = not at all satisfied, 7 = extremely satisfied). Finally, they indicated

which method (inclusion or exclusion) they would use to narrow down their choices if they were to repeat the same task.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Manipulation check

Consistent with past research (Smith & Bargh, 2008), two independent judges blind to the experimental conditions rated the writings on a seven-point scale (1 = no power at all, 7 = a lot of power) for how much power participants seemed to have ($r = .80$). The judges rated participants in the high power condition to have significantly more power ($M_{\text{High Power}} = 5.81$) than those in the low power condition ($M_{\text{Low Power}} = 2.41$; $t = 24.5$, $p < .01$).

4.2.2. Mood

The mood-based explanation implies that mood will mediate the effect of power on choice. To test this alternative explanation, we created a positive mood index by summing respondents' scores on happy, content, joyful, calm, relieved, and relaxed (Chronbach's $\alpha = .82$). A negative mood index was created by summing responses to sad, disappointed, depressed, nervous, worried, and tense (Chronbach's $\alpha = .89$). One-way ANOVAs revealed that neither positive nor negative mood was significantly affected by the power manipulation ($F_{\text{Positive}} = 1.53$, $p = .22$, and $F_{\text{Negative}} = .98$, $p = .38$). The mood-based explanation is therefore ruled out.

4.2.3. Power and decision strategy

The results show a strong association between participants' power and their preferred decision strategy (see Fig. 1). Prior to completing the narrowing task, 66% of low power participants indicated a preference for exclusion, compared to 58% in the control condition and 32% in the high power condition. This contrast was even more pronounced after participants had completed the narrowing task. Indeed, 76% of participants in the low power condition indicated that they would adopt the exclusion strategy if they were to repeat the study, compared to 54% in the control group, and only 18% in the high power condition.

Logistic regressions to test the significance of these effects were run with initial choice of decision strategy as the dependent variable and two dummy variables for the three power conditions as independent variables. The results revealed a significant difference between the high power group and the control group (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 6.66$, $p = .01$). The difference between the control and the low power groups, albeit in the predicted direction, did not reach statistical significance (Wald $\chi^2(1) = .68$, $p = .41$). A second regression model with future decision strategy as the dependent variable, and controlling for the initial choice of decision strategy indicated a significant difference between high power consumers and those in the control group (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 7.72$, $p < .01$), as well as a significant difference between consumers in the control group and those in the low power group (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 4.67$, $p = .03$). These findings are consistent with H1 and the notion that power increases consumers' tendency to select whereas powerlessness increases their propensity to reject.

A 3 (low power vs. control vs. high power) \times 2 (exclusion vs. inclusion) analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with satisfaction as the dependent variable (see Fig. 2), revealed no main effect of decision strategy ($F(1, 144) = 2.05$, $p = .15$), a marginal main effect of power ($F(2, 144) = 2.74$, $p = .07$), and a significant power \times strategy interaction ($F(2, 144) = 21.69$, $p < .01$). Consistent with predictions, powerful consumers were more satisfied with their chosen option after using an inclusion strategy ($M = 6.26$, $SD = .75$) than after using an exclusion strategy ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.67$, $F(1, 144) = 29.96$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, low power participants reported marginally greater satisfaction when they adopted an exclusion strategy ($M = 6.18$, $SD = .88$) than when they adopted an inclusion strategy ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.37$, $F(1, 144) = 3.05$, $p = .08$). In contrast, the satisfaction level of participants in the control

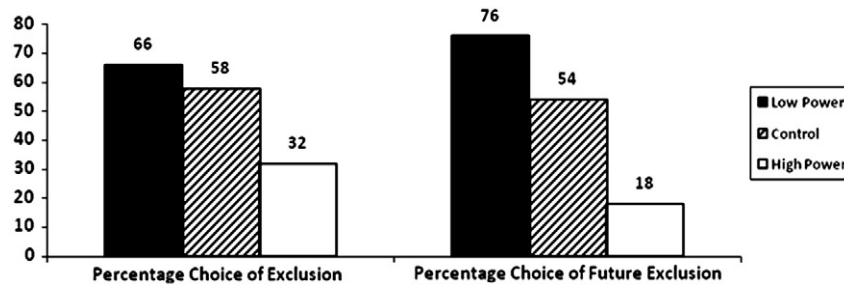


Fig. 1. Power and preference for exclusion versus inclusion.

condition did not vary across decision strategies ($M_{\text{Exclusion}} = 5.75$ vs. $M_{\text{Inclusion}} = 5.33$, $F(1, 144) = 1.98$, $p = .16$).

4.3. Discussion

The findings from study 1 provide support for the hypothesis that power increases the likelihood of adopting a select versus a reject strategy. Further, consistent with H2, high power consumers are more satisfied with their choices when they adopt a select strategy than when they adopt a reject strategy, whereas the reverse is true for low power consumers. The predictions are based on expected differences in the activation of the behavioral approach and inhibition systems across high and low power. Specifically, since high power activates the behavioral approach system, this will direct consumers' attention to the choice options' positive features. High power consumers then prefer selecting over rejecting because selecting accentuates the options' positive features. In contrast, low power activates the behavioral inhibition system, and makes consumers particularly sensitive to the choice options' negative features. Low power consumers prefer rejecting over selecting because rejecting accentuates the choice options' negative features. To further test this mechanism, the moderating effect of responsibility is examined next.

Power often comes with an increased sense of responsibility (Chen et al., 2001; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Parents, for instance, occupy the high power position in their relationship with their children and are also responsible for their children's wellbeing. Similarly, consumers are often guided by their sense of responsibility when privileging products and firms that promote fair trade and environmental conservation. This sense of responsibility can raise the perceived constraints that a powerful individual feels (Smith & Bargh, 2008). Focusing on one's responsibilities is also associated with greater vigilance (Higgins, 1997), which leads to increased inhibition and reduced approach-related tendencies on the part of the power holder. Extant research lends some support to this view. For example, people's sense of responsibility is found to moderate the effect of power on risk-taking (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006) and on perceptions of others (Overbeck & Park, 2001). However, for this moderation to occur, responsibility needs to be explicitly emphasized, as most people, at least in the North-American culture, do not spontaneously consider their responsibilities when their sense of power is

activated (Smith & Bargh, 2008). Since responsibility enhances the activation of the inhibition system while hampering the activation of the approach system, making consumers' responsibility salient should increase consumers' attention to negative features, while decreasing their attention to positive features. This should result in a greater tendency to adopt a reject strategy even for powerful consumers.

H3. When consumers' sense of responsibility is made salient, the effect of power on decision strategy will be reduced. Specifically, both high and low power consumers will prefer rejection over selection decision strategies.

H4. When consumers' sense of responsibility is made salient, the interactive effect of power and decision strategy on consumers' satisfaction will be reduced. Specifically, both high and low power consumers will be more satisfied with their choices after adopting a reject than a select strategy.

5. Study 2

5.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and sixty eight undergraduate students (88 women) in a Canadian university participated in study 2 in exchange for course credit. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 27 ($M = 21.2$, $\sigma = 2.2$). The study consisted of a 2 (high power vs. low power) \times 2 (high responsibility vs. low responsibility) between-subject design.

Power was manipulated using a role-based procedure adapted from Galinsky et al. (2003). Specifically, participants were first asked to complete a leadership questionnaire, purportedly to determine which of a manager or subordinate role they will be assigned to in a later group task. Next, half of them were randomly assigned to the manager role and the other half to the subordinate role. The managers were told that they had complete control over the work process, evaluations of the subordinates, and division of rewards. The subordinates, in contrast, were told that they had no control over the work process, evaluation process, or division of rewards. Participants in the high responsibility condition were told that their role comes with a great deal of responsibility, and that they were highly responsible for the outcome of the project as well as the

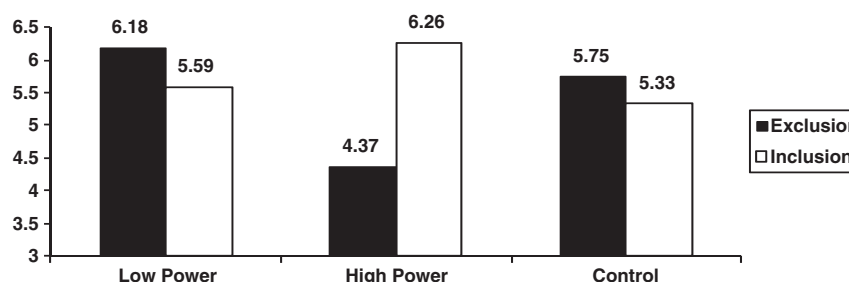


Fig. 2. Effect of power and decision strategy on satisfaction with choice.

wellbeing of their employees (coworkers). Those in the low responsibility condition were not told anything about responsibility. Finally, all participants were told that prior to receiving their role and participating in the group task, they were to pretest some consumer choice scenarios for an unrelated study. They were then presented with the same two-part choice-narrowing task used in study 1.

5.2. Results

Within the low responsibility condition, the choice patterns resembled those found in study 1 (Fig. 3). Prior to completing the narrowing task, 61.9% of low power participants indicated a preference for exclusion, compared to 33.3% in the high power condition ($\chi^2(1) = 6.87, p < .01$). Furthermore, the difference in preference for inclusion versus exclusion was even greater after participants had completed the narrowing task. When asked which narrowing strategy they would use in the future, 76.2% of low power consumers indicated exclusion, compared to only 26.2% of high power consumers ($\chi^2(1) = 21.01, p < .01$). In contrast, in the high responsibility condition, participants with low and high power did not vary in their preference for exclusion versus inclusion strategy either prior to completing the task (64.3% vs. 66.7%), ($\chi^2(1) = .05, p = .82$) or after completing the task (73.8% vs. 66.7%), ($\chi^2(1) = .51, p = .47$).

The significance of these results was further ascertained through logistic regressions. A first model, with initial choice of decision strategy as the dependent variable, and power, responsibility, and their interaction as independent factors, revealed a significant effect of power (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 6.68, p = .01$), a non-significant effect of responsibility (Wald $\chi^2(1) = .05, p = .82$), and a significant power \times responsibility interaction (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 3.94, p = .05$) consistent with H3. A second regression model with future decision strategy as the dependent variable, and controlling for the initial choice of decision strategy also showed a significant effect of power (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 13.58, p < .01$), a non-significant effect of responsibility (Wald $\chi^2(1) = .343, p = .56$), and a significant power \times responsibility interaction (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 3.83, p = .05$).

A 2 (power) \times 2 (responsibility) \times 2 (strategy) ANOVA, with satisfaction as the dependent variable, revealed a significant main effect of strategy ($F(1, 160) = 36.9, p < .01$). Overall, participants who used an exclusion strategy were more satisfied with their final choice than those who used an inclusion strategy ($M_{\text{Exclude}} = 5.89, SD = .10$ vs. $M_{\text{Include}} = 5.04, SD = 1.49$). The results also indicated a significant power \times strategy interaction ($F(1, 160) = 34.26, p < .01$), a significant responsibility \times strategy interaction ($F(1, 160) = 18.66, p < .01$), and more importantly, a significant power \times strategy \times responsibility three-way interaction ($F(1, 160) = 25.09, p < .01$). To better understand this interaction, separate analyses for each responsibility condition (see Fig. 4) were conducted.

Data from the low responsibility group were consistent with the results obtained in study 1. A 2 (power) \times 2 (strategy) ANOVA revealed no main effects of power ($F(1, 160) = 2.79, p = .10$) and decision strategy ($F(1, 160) = 1.55, p = .22$), but a significant power \times strategy interaction ($F(1, 160) = 59.41, p < .01$). Low power consumers were more satisfied with their choices after using a reject strategy ($M = 6.15, SD = .19$) than after using an include strategy

($M = 4.13, SD = .24, F(1, 160) = 41.31, p < .01$). In contrast, high power consumers scored higher on the satisfaction ratings after using an include strategy ($M = 6.25, SD = .18$) than an exclude strategy ($M = 4.79, SD = .26, F(1, 160) = 20.28, p < .01$). Thus H2 was supported.

In the high responsibility condition, however, the only significant result was the main effect of strategy ($F(1, 160) = 35.35, p < .01$). Consistent with H4, this result indicates that consumers were more satisfied with their choices after adopting an exclusion strategy than after adopting an inclusion strategy ($M_{\text{Exclude}} = 6.05, SD = .78$ vs. $M_{\text{Include}} = 4.38, SD = 1.37, F(1, 160) = 53.99, p < .01$). Power did not influence satisfaction ($F(1, 160) = .18, p = .67$) and did not moderate the effect of strategy. Indeed, the power \times strategy interaction was not significant ($F(1, 160) = .35, p = .55$).

5.3. Discussion

Study 2 provides some insights into the mechanism underlying the effect of power on decision strategy. Because focusing on one's responsibilities is known to hinder the activation of the approach system (Higgins, 1997), priming respondents sense of responsibility will shift powerful consumers' attention from the positive features to the negative features. This shift in focus will reduce powerful consumers' tendency to adopt a select strategy while increasing their likelihood of adopting a reject strategy.

6. General discussion

The current research examines the influence of power on decision strategy and the underlying mechanism. Building on the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), the main proposition is that activation of the behavioral approach system will direct powerful consumers' attention to positive features, and make selecting a more preferred strategy than rejecting, whereas activation of the behavioral inhibition system will shift powerless consumers' attention to negative features and make rejecting a more preferred strategy than selecting.

Consistent with the proposition, study 1 finds that a heightened sense of power increases preference for selecting versus rejecting. Further, high power consumers are more satisfied with their choices when they adopt a select strategy than a reject strategy. Conversely, low power consumers are more satisfied when they adopt a reject strategy than a select strategy. In study 2, the moderating role of responsibility is investigated. A heightened sense of responsibility should raise the perceived constraints that a powerful individual feels which, in turn, should limit the relative activation of the approach system and reduce preference for choosing versus rejecting. The data showed that the effect of power on decision strategy indeed disappears when consumers' sense of responsibility is made salient. A high sense of responsibility also makes both high and low power consumers more satisfied with their choices after adopting a reject strategy than after adopting a select strategy.

Study 2 provides some insights into the mechanism underlying the effect of power on decision strategy, but only partially, because the study did not show that high power consumers paid more attention to positive features in the first place, and that low power consumers paid more attention to negative features. To assess this component of the mechanism, we conducted an additional study in which participants were asked to select/reject between an enriched option (product with extreme positive and negative features) and an impoverished option (product with average features) in two product categories: vacation spots and electric grills (see appendix for details). If power increases attention to positive features, then high power consumers should select the enriched option over the impoverished option more frequently than low power consumers. Similarly, if low power shifts attention to negative features, then low power consumers should reject the enriched option more frequently than high power consumers. Thus, compatibility between state of power and decision strategy (high

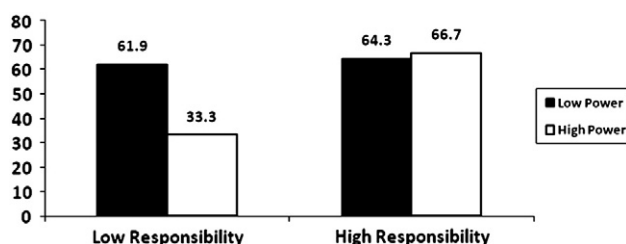


Fig. 3. Effect of power and responsibility on preference for exclusion versus inclusion.

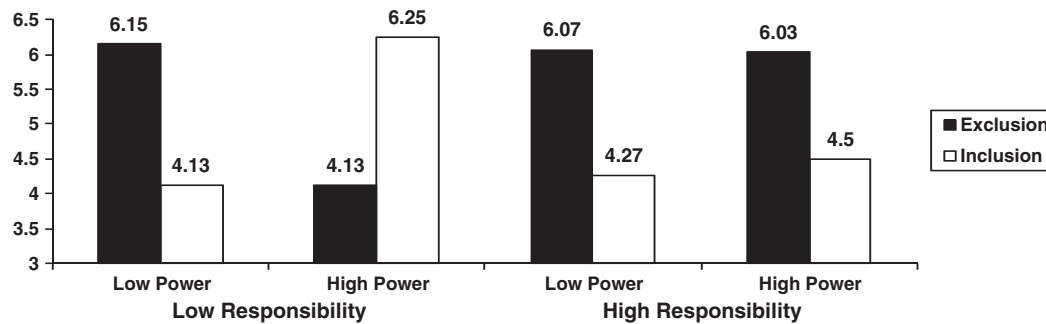


Fig. 4. Effect of power, decision strategy, and responsibility on satisfaction with choice.

power/select and low power/reject) is expected to increase the enriched option's likelihood of being chosen as well as rejected. By the same token, incompatibility between state of power and decision strategy (high power/reject and low power/select) should reduce the likelihood of selecting and rejecting the enriched option. This is because incompatibility often leads to greater processing (Houston, Childers, & Heckler, 1987; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Nagpal & Krishnamurthy, 2008), and thus greater consideration of both positive and negative features, which should ultimately reduce the frequency of both choosing and rejecting the enriched option. One hundred and thirty-two undergraduate students (64 women), with an age range from 19 to 32 participated in this study in exchange for course credits ($M = 21.5$, $\sigma = 1.87$). The study consisted of a 2 (high power vs. low power) $\times 2$ (choosing vs. rejecting) between-subject design. Consistent with predictions, when instructed to choose, high power consumers selected the enriched option (69.7% of the time across the two scenarios) more frequently than low power consumers (39.4% of the time across the two scenarios, $\chi^2(1) = 12.22$, $p < .01$). In contrast, when instructed to reject, low power consumers rejected the enriched option (66.7% of the time across the two scenarios) more frequently than high power consumers (48.5% of the time across the two scenarios, $\chi^2(1) = 4.47$, $p = .04$).

This research has several implications. First, the strategies of selection and rejection affect almost all aspects of the decision process, including perceived decision difficulty, final choice and post-choice satisfaction. Yet, the current literature often focuses on the outcomes of such strategies, and offers little insight into the conditions under which consumers are more likely to adopt a specific decision strategy. The few studies that explored this issue (e.g., Heller et al., 2002; Levin et al., 2001) have focused exclusively on the role of task characteristics. To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first to investigate the effect of a consumer characteristic (i.e., power) on decision strategy. Understanding what determines the use of one strategy over another and which type of customers are likely to select versus reject can help firms better tailor their marketing activities towards customers. For example, firms can encourage customers to adopt one strategy over the other to enhance their satisfaction with the chosen product. Past research has shown that adopting a selection strategy generally leads to a more enjoyable experience (Park et al., 2000). The findings indicate that this is especially the case when consumers feel in control. In situations where consumers may feel powerless (e.g., having to decide among complex medical procedures), the results suggest that framing the choice as a reject decision is preferable.

Second, despite power's all-pervading presence in everyday life, power's role in consumer decision-making has been at best understudied. Recently, Rucker and Galinsky (2008) reported that powerless consumers are willing to pay more for status-related products than powerful consumers. They theorized that powerlessness induces a desire to acquire products associated with status in order to compensate

for the lack of power. This research, along with the work of Rucker and Galinsky (2008, 2009), underscores the need for future research to systematically examine the role of power at various phases of the decision-making process (e.g., problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, choice, and post-decisional processes). This is particularly important in today's economy, where advances in technology have led to consumers having unparalleled access to information about products. As a result, consumers have a greater say in product design, pricing, distribution, and promotion activities of the firm than ever before (Morrissey, 2005; Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006). This shift in power from suppliers to consumers not only affects how consumers make decisions, but also has important implications for how businesses compete and how they build and maintain profitable relationships with their customers (Pires et al., 2006).

Future research could further examine the processes described in this research. For instance, study 2 suggests that a heightened sense of responsibility leads to increased vigilance, which may raise empowered consumers' likelihood of adopting a reject strategy. While study 2's findings are consistent with this account, future research would benefit from measuring consumers' vigilance and testing its mediating effect. Another important area of future research is to understand how firms can empower consumers. For example, Burger King uses the tag line – HAVE IT YOUR WAY –, which might evoke a feeling of being powerful. One can mine how various message characteristics influence the activation of consumers' sense of power. Last, this research examines the influence of power on decision strategy. However, the reverse might also be true. That is, the adopted decision strategy might influence consumers' subjective sense of power. In fact, past research suggests that selecting is considered as a more important and consequential task than rejecting (Ganzach, 1995; Huber et al., 1987; Meloy & Russo, 2004). Would selecting make consumers feel more powerful than rejecting?

Appendix A

Choice scenarios from study 3

Enriched/impoverished Scenario 1 Reject Frame (from Shafir, 1993)

Imagine that you are planning a week vacation in a warm spot over spring break. You currently have two options that are reasonably priced, but you can no longer retain your reservation for both. The travel brochure gives only a limited amount of information about the two options. Given the information available, which reservation do you decide to cancel?

Spot A

- Average weather
- Average beaches
- Medium-quality hotel
- Medium-temperature water
- Average nightlife

Spot B

- Lots of sunshine
- Gorgeous beaches and coral reefs
- Ultra modern hotel
- Very cold water and very strong winds
- No nightlife

I would cancel reservation ____

Enriched/impooverished Scenario 2 Choose Frame

Imagine that you are shopping for a new electric grill. You currently have two options that are reasonably priced. Both grills are available in the same two colors (black, and stainless steel), but they differ on some important attributes. Given the attribute information described below, which grill would you prefer?

Grill A	Grill B
• Average cooking surface	• Small cooking surface
• Average cooking speed	• Very low cooking speed
• Relatively easy to clean	• Very easy to clean
• Fair cooking quality (judged on the appearance of food and juiciness)	• Excellent cooking quality (judged on the appearance of food and juiciness)

I would prefer grill ____

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