Choosing Variety for Joint-Consumption

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Consumers often make choices for themselves and another person, and these choices may include more or less variety. When planning a weekend for herself and her spouse, for example, an individual could choose more varied activities (e.g., going out to dinner, to a movie, and to a concert) or less varied activities (e.g., going out to dinner at different restaurants). What might affect how much variety consumers prefer for joint-consumption? Eight studies demonstrate that people’s preferences for variety among what they do with a committed relationship partner depends on where they see themselves in the course of the relationship. Compared to committed relationships that have lasted only a short time (e.g., five years), people should perceive less future time ahead of committed relationships that have lasted for a longer time (e.g., 10 years). This difference in future time perceptions changes whether consumers value excitement or calm in the relationship, and as a result, how much variety people want among what they do with their partner. Consumers prefer less variety for joint-consumption when they see their committed relationship as older versus newer.
Variety plays a key role in choice. People are attracted to varied product assortments (Broniarczyk, Hoyer, and McAlister 1998; Hoch, Bradlow, and Wansink 1999; Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Rolls et al. 1981) and choose varied consumption experiences even when it means selecting less preferred items (Ariely and Levav 2000; Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999). Decades of research has examined consumers’ variety preferences for personal consumption (Ariely and Levav 2000; Berylne 1970; Kahn and Wansink 2004; Menon and Kahn 1995; Ratner and Kahn 2002; Raju 1980; Simonson 1990).

In addition to choosing more or less variety for themselves, however, consumers also choose more or less variety intended for joint-consumption with another person. When a person decides what to do with his or her spouse over the weekend, for instance, that person could choose more varied activities to do together (e.g., going out to dinner, to a movie, and to a concert) or less varied activities to do together (e.g., going out to dinner at different restaurants). While prior work provides much insight into factors that drive variety preferences when choosing for individual-consumption, less is known about what shapes variety preferences when choosing for joint-consumption. What might affect how much variety consumers prefer?

Eight studies demonstrate that how much variety people prefer for joint-consumption depends on where they see themselves in the course of the relationship. Building on the aging literature (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles 1999; Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar 2012; Williams and Drolet 2005), we argue that committed relationships should seem to have less future time ahead of them as couples have been together longer. Compared to committed relationships that are (or seem) new, committed relationships that they are (or seem) older should be perceived as having less future time ahead. This shift in future time perceptions should affect
what emotions people value in the relationship, and consequently, how much variety they prefer among what they do with their partner.

A few points merit clarification. First, this paper focuses on committed romantic relationships that partners intend to stay in. We examine both married and unmarried partners, so long as they see the relationship as one that will last. Preliminary evidence (General Discussion) also suggests the effects may generalize to other relationships where partners frequently interact, such as close friendships. Second, we examine situations where individuals choose experiences that they intend to share with their partner. The act of choice is done individually, but the choices are intended for joint-consumption. That consumption is intended to be “joint” is important, as we show that choices for individual-consumption do not generate the same effects. Third, the key driver of individuals’ choices for joint-consumption is perceived future time ahead of the relationship. While committed relationships may have objectively lasted for a shorter or longer amount of time (e.g., five vs. 10 years), relationships of the same actual length (e.g., five years) may psychologically feel newer or older. Relationships that seem newer (vs. older) should be perceived as having more (vs. less) future time ahead of them, and these relationship time perceptions influence how much variety consumers prefer for joint-consumption.

Our findings make four key contributions. First, we integrate research on variety-seeking, time perceptions, and relationships to further understanding of consumer behavior in relationship contexts (Simpson, Griskevicius, and Rothman 2012). Where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship affects how much variety they prefer for joint-consumption. Second, we build on the aging literature (Carstensen 2006; Carstensen et al. 1999; Williams and Drolet 2005) by demonstrating that relationships have a “life course,” with implications for partners’ values and preferences pertaining to that relationship. Third, we extend prior work on how social factors
shape variety preferences (e.g., Ariely and Levav 2000; Kim and Drolet 2003; Laran 2010; Ratner and Kahn 2002) by examining how much variety consumers prefer when choosing for themselves and another person. Fourth, we add to growing evidence that variety shapes judgment and behaviors (Berger, Draganska, and Simonson 2007; Etkin and Ratner 2012; Mogilner, Rudnick, and Iyengar 2008) by demonstrating consequences of perceived variety for how people feel and behave towards their relationships.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review relevant work on variety-seeking, relationships, and time perceptions to develop our predictions. Next, eight studies conducted in the field and the lab test these hypotheses. We study a broad range of consumers in committed romantic relationships (e.g., men and women, young and old, unmarried and married) and measure variety preferences in multiple ways. Together our findings shed light on when (and why) consumers prefer more versus less variety for joint-consumption.

CHOOSING VARIETY IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Consumers have an innate preference for variety. Variety is stimulating and rewarding (Berlyne 1970; Kahn and Ratner 2005; Raju 1980), and choosing variety can reduce satiation (Latin and McAlister 1985; McAlister 1982) even when switching among familiar items (Faison 1977; Ratner et al. 1999; Venketesan 1973). Yet, while most people prefer some amount of variety in their consumption experiences (Kahn 1995; Menon and Kahn 1995; Ratner et al. 1999; Simonson 1990), how much variety they want depends on several personal and situational factors (Etkin and Ratner 2012; 2013; Faison 1977; McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Raju 1980; Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992).
One factor shown to impact variety preferences is whether choice is public. Several articles have demonstrated that choosing in front of others affects how much variety consumers prefer (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Ratner and Kahn 2002). When choices are socially observable, consumers use variety to communicate desired social identities, such as being interesting (Ratner and Kahn 2002), expressive (Kim and Drolet 2003), and having well-defined preferences (Sela and Maimaran 2014). Expecting that others would see their choices, for example, led people to choose more varied candies in order to seem interesting (Ratner and Kahn 2002) and less varied wines to seem like domain experts (Sela and Maimaran 2014).

Who choices are made for also affects variety preferences. In addition to choosing for the self, consumers can make choices for others. For example, one may buy coffee for a colleague, or snacks for a friend. Choices made on behalf of others often differ from choices made for the self (Liu et al. 2013; Polman 2012; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). When consumers choose for themselves, for instance, they tend to balance multiple goals, but when choosing for others, they prioritize a single goal (Laran 2010). As a result, people tend to choose more varied items for themselves (reflecting an attempt to balance multiple goals) than they choose on behalf of others (reflecting a singular focus on one goal). For instance, in Laran (2010) study 1, participants selected a more varied snack assortment when choosing snacks they themselves would consume than when choosing snacks that would be consumed by a friend.

While prior work provides insight into how social factors shape variety preferences, they do not examine choices intended for joint-consumption. Ariely and Levav (2000), for instance, examined how choosing in front of others (e.g., ordering entrées at a restaurant) influenced each group member’s individual entrée choice. The presence of others influenced what participants chose, but each choice (i.e., each dinner entrée) was ultimately consumed alone (also see Ratner
and Kahn 2002). Laran (2010) compared individuals’ choices for themselves to their choices on behalf of another person, but each party (i.e., the self and the friend) consumed the chosen items alone. None of these examples describe situations where consumers make choices with the intention of sharing choice outcomes (i.e., the dinner entrée or the snacks) with another person.

Particularly in relationship contexts, however, consumers often make choices that they intend to consume with their relationship partner. For instance, an individual may choose where to go to dinner, what movie to rent, or what concert to see for both herself and her spouse. Joint-consumption choices may also be more or less varied. Over a weekend, for example, a person could choose to do more varied activities with his partner (e.g., going out to eat one night, to a movie the next, and to a concert the next), or to do less varied activities with his partner (e.g., going out to three different restaurants). When making choices for joint-consumption, what might affect how much variety consumers prefer?

**THE CURRENT RESEARCH**

We propose that whether individuals prefer more or less variety among what they do with a partner depends on where they see themselves in the course of the relationship.

Committed relationships differ in how long they have lasted. Couples in newer relationships, for example, have been together relatively short amounts of time (e.g., five years), whereas couples in older relationships have been together longer amounts of time (e.g., 10 years). Further, relationships that have lasted the same objective amount of time (e.g., five years) can psychologically seem newer or older. When compared to a 10-year relationship, for instance, a five-year relationship should feel relatively new. When comparing that same relationship to a
one-year relationship, in contrast, the five-year relationship should seem relatively old. Likewise, thinking about how five years is a short amount of time should make a five-year relationship seem newer, whereas thinking about how five years is a long amount of time should make that same relationship seem older.

How long a committed relationship has lasted, or seems to have lasted, should be linked to the perceived amount of time remaining ahead of it in the future. Building on the aging literature (Carstensen et al. 1999; Mogilner et al. 2012; Williams and Drolet 2005), we argue that as committed relationships grow longer (i.e., have lasted for more time), the time that lies ahead of them in the future should shrink. Compared to a 10-year relationship, for example, a five-year committed relationship should have more future time ahead of it. Assuming a similar lifespan, while the 10-year relationship may last several more decades, the five-year relationship should last even longer. Supporting this view, a preliminary survey (N = 80) found that how long relationships had lasted (in years and months) was negatively correlated with perceived future time ahead of the relationship (“How much time does your relationship have ahead of it?” 1 = Very little time, 7 = A lot of time; r = -.39, p < .001). While this may differ for relationships that may not last, in committed relationships, past and future time perceptions should be linked.

Consequently, where consumers see themselves in the course of a committed relationship should impact how much future time they see left ahead of it. When consumers have been in a committed relationship for a short amount of time, or see the relationship as relatively new, they should perceive more future time left ahead of the relationship. When consumers have been in a committed relationship for a longer time, or see the relationship as older, in contrast, they should perceive less future time left ahead of the relationship.
Time Perceptions and Valued Emotions

We argue that this shift in future time perceptions should impact variety preferences by changing what emotions are valued in the relationship. In particular, we suggest that when consumers perceive more future time ahead of a relationship, they should value excitement in that relationship, whereas when consumers perceive less future time ahead of a relationship, they should value calm in that relationship.

This suggestion is based in part on the aging literature (Carstensen 1992; Carstensen et al. 1999; Mogilner, Kamvar, and Aaker 2011; Sinha and Wang 2013; Williams and Drolet 2005), which suggests that perceiving future time as expansive versus limited may affect the value of excitement versus calm. Whereas excitement is linked to future events, calmness is linked to appreciation of the present (Kamvar and Harris 2009). Perceiving future time as expansive, which increases focus on the future, can thus lead people to value feeling excited. Perceiving future time as limited, which increases focus on the present, however, can lead people to value feeling calm (Mogilner et al. 2012; 2011). For example, Mogilner et al. (2012) demonstrated that when future time seemed expansive, people chose a product or experience for themselves (e.g., a bottle of water, a bag of tea, a song) that felt exciting, but when future time seemed limited, people chose a product or experience for themselves that felt calming.

Building on these findings, we argue that perceiving more versus less future time ahead of a committed relationship should affect whether consumers value excitement or calm in the relationship. When people perceive more future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., they have been in the relationship a short time or see it as new), they should want the relationship to feel exciting. When people perceive less future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., they have been in
the relationship a longer time or see it as old), in contrast, they should want the relationship to feel calm.

*Variety and Desired Emotions*

We argue that these differing desires for excitement versus calm in the relationship, should in turn, impact how much variety consumers prefer for joint-consumption.

More variety often feels exciting. Variety is by definition associated with stimulation and change (Berlyne 1970; Kahn 1995; Raju 1980), and choosing varied products and experiences makes for exciting and stimulating consumption experiences (Faison 1977; Menon and Kahn 1995; Venkatesan 1973). Consumers find it stimulating, for example, to choose products they have not chosen recently (Venkatesan 1973) and to switch among even familiar items (Faison 1977; McAlister 1982).

The amount of variety consumed can also affect feelings of calm. While consumers typically desire some variety in their consumption experiences, too much variety can be overwhelming and aversive (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Mogilner et al. 2008). When they feel overly stimulated, people reduce stimulation by choosing less variety (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Menon and Kahn 1995; Raju 1980). Indeed, prior work finds that consumers tend to simplify buying decisions by choosing similar items. People tend to eat similar foods (e.g., cereal) at the same meal (e.g., breakfast) across days (Khare and Inman 2006), for instance, and to buy similar amounts at the same store across visits (Vogel, Evanschitzky, and Ramaseshan 2008). By reducing complexity, choosing less varied (i.e., more consistent) items should facilitate a sense of calm.
Choosing Variety for Joint-Consumption

Integrating these ideas, when choosing what to do with a partner, we propose that where consumers see themselves in the course of a committed relationship should determine their preference for variety. When people perceive more future time ahead of their committed relationship, they value excitement. Incorporating more variety into what one does with one’s partner should, in turn, make the relationship feel exciting. As a result, when individuals choose for themselves and a partner, perceiving more future time ahead of the relationship (e.g., because the relationship has only lasted a short time or seems new) should increase preferences for variety.

When people perceive less future time ahead of their committed relationship, however, they value calm. Incorporating less variety into what one does with one’s partner should, in turn, make the relationship feel calmer. As a result, when individuals choose for themselves and a partner, perceiving less future time ahead of the relationship (e.g., because the relationship has lasted a long time or seems older) should decrease preferences for variety. Overall, when relationships have lasted for longer (vs. shorter) periods of time, or people are made to see their relationship as older (vs. newer), they should prefer less variety in joint-consumption.

Consistent with our focus on joint-consumption in relationship contexts, we demonstrate the unique value of studying joint-consumption by showing that how long people feel they have been in a relationship does not have the same impact on choices for just the self. Like many phenomena, the predicted effects should be stronger on outcomes closer to the underlying drivers. For example, imagine that you feel happy with your spouse. You might treat them to an unusually expensive dinner, but that doesn’t necessarily mean you would spend more money on dinner for yourself. The positive feelings that emerged within the context of that specific
relationship (i.e., your marriage) should more strongly influence outcomes pertaining to that relationship (i.e., the decision to spend more money on dinner with your spouse).

Likewise, perceived future time ahead of a relationship should particularly influence feelings and decisions related to that relationship. The emotions (excitement vs. calm) desired within a specific relationship should drive variety preferences within that relationship, but may not affect variety preferences beyond it. Thus, whereas we expect a greater preference for variety in joint-consumption when people perceive more future time ahead of their relationship, we do not expect a comparable effect when people choose with the intention to consume alone. We test this argument in study 2 by manipulating where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship and comparing choice of variety for individual- versus joint-consumption.

**Consequences for Relationships**

Our theorizing also has implications for how consumers feel and behave towards their relationships. People are more committed to a relationship when the relationship meets their needs (Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew 1998; Van Lange et al. 1997), and people should feel their needs are being met to a greater extent when the emotions valued in the relationship match the emotions experienced. For instance, when excitement is valued, feeling that the relationship is exciting should enhance commitment to the relationship. Likewise, when calmness is valued, feeling that the relationship is calm should enhance commitment to the relationship.

Consequently, we expect that the (actual or perceived) variety among the experiences consumers share with a partner will influence commitment to that relationship. When future time ahead of the relationship seems expansive and excitement is valued, perceiving more variety in joint-consumption (which feels exciting) should increase relationship commitment. When future
time ahead of the relationship seems limited and calm is valued, however, perceiving less variety in joint-consumption (which feels calming) should increase relationship commitment. This enhanced commitment should lead people to behave more positively (e.g., spend more money on dinner, pick up flowers) towards their relationship partner (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult et al. 1998).

**Overview of Studies**

Eight studies test this theorizing. Studies 1-3 investigate the impact of where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship on choosing variety for joint-consumption. In particular, they measure (study 1) and manipulate (studies 2 and 3) how long people feel they have been in a relationship, and also directly manipulate how much future time is perceived ahead of a relationship (study 3). Study 4 shows that the effect on choosing variety for individual-consumption is not the same as choosing variety for joint-consumption, and study 5 extends the findings to examine how much consumers are willingness to pay for a more versus less varied joint-experience. Study 6 tests the proposed underlying emotional drivers, and finally, studies 7 and 8 explore consequences of perceiving more or less variety in joint-consumption for how people feel and behave towards their relationship. Together these studies demonstrate when (and why) consumers prefer more versus less variety when choosing for joint-consumption.

**STUDY 1: ACTUAL TIME IN RELATIONSHIPS AND VARIETY PREFERENCES**

Study 1 examines the naturalistic link between how long consumers have been in a relationship and their preference for variety in joint-consumption. The survey reported in the
introduction showed that relationships that have lasted for more time are perceived as having less future time ahead of them. Building on this, we had participants choose multiple activities to do with their partner and measured how long they had been in this relationship. We predicted that committed relationships that had lasted for more time (where future time ahead should seem more limited) would be associated with choosing less varied joint-activities.

**Design and Method**

Sixty-four Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 30 years, 39% female, 29% married, mean relationship = 6.17 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Three participants reported distractions while completing the study and were excluded from further analysis ($N = 61$).\(^1\)

First, participants viewed a set of five activities (“go out to eat,” “watch a movie,” “listen to live music,” “go for a walk,” and “exercise.”) and chose five they would like to do with their partner over the next week. They could either pick five distinct activities, or the same one(s) multiple times. Following prior work (e.g., Simonson 1990), we assessed variety preferences by recording the number of distinct options participants chose (1-5). Then, along with their gender, age and marital status, participants indicated how long they had been in the relationship (in years and months).\(^2\)

**Results and Discussion**

Consistent with our theorizing, the longer participants had been in their relationship, the

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\(^1\) Distraction was assessed at the end of each study by asking participants whether they experienced distractions while completing the study (yes-no). Participants who indicated “yes” were excluded from subsequent analyses.

\(^2\) These items were collected at the end of this and each subsequent study.
less variety they chose for joint-consumption with their partner ($r = -.27, p < .05$). For relationships that had lasted five years, for example, participants chose an average of 3.34 distinct joint-activities, whereas for relationships that had lasted 20 years, they chose an average of 2.72 distinct joint-activities.

**STUDY 2: MANIPULATING HOW LONG RELATIONSHIPS SEEM TO HAVE LASTED**

Building on study 1, study 2 more deeply examines the causal relationship between how long consumers feel they have been in a relationship and their variety preferences for joint-consumption. Instead of measuring the time participants had been in their relationship, we manipulated how long they perceived this time to be. Participants again chose multiple activities to do with their relationship partner, and we varied whether the same relationship seemed newer (i.e., having lasted for a short time) or older (i.e., having lasted for a longer time). Perceiving relationships as older (where less future time should be perceived ahead of the relationship) should thus decrease how much variety participants choose for joint-consumption.

*Design and Method*

Fifty-five Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 30 years, 46% female, 31% married, mean relationship = 6.38 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: newer versus older relationship. Three participants reported being distracted while completing the study and were excluded from further analysis ($N = 52$).
First, we manipulated whether participants’ relationship seemed newer versus older. Using a response-frequency scale manipulation adapted from prior work (e.g., Etkin and Ratner 2012; Schwarz et al. 1988), we asked participants two questions about their relationship (“How long have you been in your current relationship?” and “When did your relationship begin?”) and varied the response scales provided. Based on the average amount of time pretest participants had been in their romantic relationship (N = 64, mean relationship = 5 years), we picked response options so that participants in the main study would see their relationship as newer or older. In response to the first question, for example, participants in the new relationship condition saw the following response options: “5 years or less,” “6-7 years,” “8-9 years,” and “10 or more years.” Participants in the old relationship condition, in contrast, saw the following options: “0-6 months,” “6-12 months,” “1-2 years,” and “2 or more years.” Consistent with the notion that the response scales should change how long participants feel they had been in a relationship, pretest participants (N = 47) felt their relationship had lasted for more time (“Please indicate your perception of the length of your relationship: 0 = Very short, 100 = Very long”) in the old (vs. new) relationship condition (M_{old} = 46.73 vs. M_{new} = 31.40; F(1, 45) = 4.31, p < .05).

Second, participants made sequential choices among a set of three activities (“go out to eat,” “watch a movie,” and “listen to live music”) they could do with their partner. They chose from these same options four separate times, as if choosing activities for different days of the week. We recorded the number of distinct options participants chose (1-3), as in study 1, and the number of switches (i.e., choosing a different option than in the previous round) they made among these options (0-3).
Results

Supporting our prediction, making relationships seem older (as opposed to newer) led participants to choose less varied activities to do with their partner ($M_{\text{old}} = 2.15$ vs. $M_{\text{new}} = 2.54$; $F(1, 50) = 6.94, p < .05$). The number of switches participants made among their choices showed the same effect. Making relationships seem older (vs. newer) led participants to switch among joint-activities less frequently ($M_{\text{old}} = 1.81$ vs. $M_{\text{new}} = 2.42$; $F(1, 50) = 6.77, p < .05$).

Discussion

Study 2 provides further evidence that how long consumers feel they have been in a relationship impacts preferences for variety in joint-consumption. Manipulating how long relationships seemed to have lasted had the same impact as measuring how long participants had actually been in the relationship (in study 1). In particular, making relationships seem older (i.e., having lasted for more time) as opposed to newer (i.e., having lasted for less time), led participants to choose less varied activities to do with their partner, and switch among these joint-activities less frequently.

These findings underscore the role of perceived (vs. actual) time perceptions in driving the effect. Because participants (and thus actual relationship length) were randomly assigned to condition, the results show that manipulating whether relationships seem newer or older led participants to choose different amounts of variety for joint-consumption. Further, the effects held controlling for actual relationship length, and actual relationship length did not have a unique impact on the number of distinct options chosen (footnote 3). Thus, whether relationships seem newer or older because they have in fact lasted for a short versus long amount of time

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3 This effect held controlling for age, gender, marital status, and actual relationship length ($F(1, 46) = 3.50, p < .07$), and these covariates did not significantly affect variety preferences ($p$’s > .17).
(study 1), or because external factors make them seem newer or older (study 2), perceived time is what drives variety preferences for joint-consumption.

Age alone is also unlikely to explain the findings. While one could argue that relationship length is correlated with age, and thus age, not how long individuals have been in a relationship, may drive variety preferences, the data cast doubt on this possibility. While age is indeed correlated with actual time spent in a relationship ($r = .63, p < .001$), there was no association between age and the number of distinct joint-activities chosen ($r = .03, p > .85$), or the number of switches made ($r = .11, p > .45$), and the key variety-seeking results held controlling for age. Although age may potentially affect variety preferences in some situations, whether relationships seem newer versus older impacts the variety chosen for joint-consumption. We return to this idea in study 2 where we compare variety preferences for individual versus joint-consumption.

**STUDY 3: MANIPULATING FUTURE TIME PERCEPTIONS**

Study 3 builds on studies 1 and 2 by directly manipulating perceived future time ahead of consumers’ relationships. We have argued that in committed relationships, the longer the relationship has lasted, the less future time should be perceived ahead of it. If future and past time in relationships are linked as we suggest, then perceiving future time ahead of relationships as longer (vs. shorter) should have a similar impact on joint-variety preferences as perceiving relationships as newer (vs. older).

To test this reasoning, we separately manipulated how long relationships seemed to have lasted (i.e., whether they seemed newer or older) and how much future time seemed left ahead of them. We predicted that individuals would choose less variety for joint-consumption when they
perceived their relationship as older (vs. newer), as in study 2, and also when they perceived less (vs. more) future time ahead of the relationship.

In addition, study 3 manipulates relationship time perceptions in a different way. Rather than inducing a high or low comparison standard, as in study 2, we simply asked participants to describe how the amount of time they had been in their relationship (or the future time left ahead) is a short versus long amount of time. Replicating our previous findings with this manipulation would underscore the role of perceived (vs. actual) time in driving the effects.

*Design and Method*

One hundred and forty-two Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 30 years, 44% female, 34% married, mean relationship = 5.77 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (time: past vs. future) X 2 (amount of time: short vs. long) between-subjects design. Three participants reported distractions and were excluded from further analysis (N = 139).

First, we varied whether participants focused on the time that had passed in their relationship (i.e., how long it had lasted) or the future time left ahead of it. All participants indicated how long (in years and months) they had been in their relationship. In the future time condition, they were asked to think about the future time left ahead of the relationship. In the past time condition, they were asked to think about the time that had passed in the relationship.

Second, we manipulated how much time participants perceived in their relationship’s past versus future. Among participants asked to focus on how long their relationship had lasted, half described how this time was short (“Describe how the length of your relationship is a short amount of time”) and half described how this time was long (“Describe how the length of your
relationship is a long amount of time”). Among participants asked to focus on future time left ahead of their relationship, half described how this remaining time was short (“Describe how the time left ahead of your relationship is a short amount of time”) and half described how this time was long (“Describe how the time left ahead of your relationship is a long amount of time”).

Third, participants viewed the same set of five activities as in study 1 (“go out to eat,” “watch a movie,” “listen to live music,” “go for a walk,” and “exercise.”) and chose five they would like to do with their partner over the next week. We recorded the number of distinct options participants chose (1-5).

Results

A 2 (time) X 2 (amount of time) ANOVA on chosen variety only revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 135) = 8.82, p < .01$; figure 1). Consistent with results of study 2, when participants focused on how long their relationship had lasted, feeling the relationship was older (i.e., had lasted for more time) versus newer (i.e., had lasted for less time) decreased the variety of joint-consumption activities they chose ($M_{\text{old}} = 3.18$ vs. $M_{\text{new}} = 3.67; F(1, 135) = 4.18, p < .05$). Further, when participants focused on future time ahead of their relationship, perceiving less versus more future time ahead decreased the variety of joint-consumption activities they chose ($M_{\text{less future time}} = 3.04$ vs. $M_{\text{more future time}} = 3.54; F(1, 135) = 4.69, p < .05$).

Discussion

Study 3 provides additional support for our theorizing by directly manipulating perceived future time ahead of consumers’ relationships. Consistent with the proposed link between past

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4 This interaction held controlling for age, gender, marital status, and actual relationship length ($F(1, 131) = 8.99, p < .01$), and these covariates did not significantly affect variety preferences ($p$’s > .18).
and future relationship time perceptions, encouraging participants to see their relationship as older (i.e., having lasted for more time) decreased how much variety they chose for joint-consumption, as did encouraging participants to perceive less future time ahead of their relationship. That we obtained these results manipulating how long participants felt they had been in their relationship in a different way further underscores the generalizability of the effect.

These findings also cast doubt on a potential construal-based alternative explanation. While one could wonder whether seeing relationships as older activates a more abstract mindset, which could potentially decrease variety preferences (Etkin and Ratner 2013; Goodman and Malkoc 2012), this notion has trouble explaining why perceiving more future time ahead of relationships (which should also lead to more abstract thinking) increases variety preferences. A construal-based alternative explanation thus seems unlikely to explain the results.

Taken together, studies 1-3 demonstrate that where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship affects how much variety they choose among activities to do with a partner. Whether manipulating how long relationships seem to have lasted or manipulating future time perceptions directly, perceiving more future time ahead of relationships decreases how much variety consumers choose for joint-consumption.

**STUDY 4: EFFECTS ARE UNIQUE TO CHOICES FOR JOINT-CONSUMPTION**

Study 4 explores the value of studying individuals’ choices for joint-consumption in relationship contexts by examining whether the same effects hold for individual-consumption. We have argued that relationship time perceptions should have the strongest impact on feelings and decisions pertaining to that relationship. Thus, while seeing relationships as newer versus
older should affect variety preferences when consumers choose for joint-consumption, there may not be a comparable effect when people choose with the intention of consuming alone.

To test this idea, we manipulated whether relationships seemed newer versus older and compared subsequent variety preferences for either individual or joint-consumption. We predicted that seeing relationships as older (vs. newer) should decrease the variety chosen for joint-consumption, but less so for individual-consumption.

Design and Method

One hundred and forty-eight Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 29 years, 36% female, 34% married, mean relationship = 5.34 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (relationship: new vs. old) X 2 (consumption: individual vs. joint) between-subjects design. Five participants reported distractions and were excluded from further analysis (N = 143).

First, we manipulated whether relationships seemed newer versus older using the same response scales from study 2. Participants answered two questions about their relationship (“How long have you been in your current relationship?” and “When did your relationship begin?”) and we varied the response scales provided.

Second, we manipulated whether choices were intended for individual or joint-consumption. All participants viewed the same set of five activities as in studies 1 and 3 (“go out to eat,” “watch a movie,” “listen to live music,” “go for a walk,” and “exercise”). In the joint-consumption condition, as in prior studies, participants chose five activities they would like to do with their partner over the next week. In the individual-consumption condition, participants
chose five activities they would like to do alone over the next week. We recorded the number of distinct options selected across conditions (1-5).

Results

A 2 (relationship) X 2 (consumption) ANOVA on chosen variety revealed a main effect of consumption type \( (F(1, 139) = 5.98, p < .05) \), qualified by the predicted interaction \( (F(1, 139) = 4.16, p < .05; \) figure 2). In the joint-consumption condition, results were similar to the prior studies. Making participants see their relationship as older, rather than newer, decreased the variety of activities they chose to consume together with their partner \( (M_{\text{old}} = 2.97 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{new}} = 3.48; F(1, 139) = 3.94, p < .05) \). There was no comparable effect, however, in the individual-consumption condition. Making participants see their relationship as older (vs. newer) had no impact on the variety of activities participants chose to consume alone \( (M_{\text{old}} = 2.89 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{new}} = 2.65; F < 1) \).

Discussion

Study 4 demonstrates that where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship affects how much variety they choose for themselves and their relationship partner, but not how much variety they choose for themselves only. In particular, seeing the relationship as older (vs. newer) decreased the variety chosen for joint-consumption, but there was no comparable effect on variety chosen for individual-consumption. Relationship time perceptions thus seem to have a

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5 This interaction held controlling for age, gender, marital status, and actual relationship length \( (F(1, 135) = 4.65, p < .05) \) and the covariates did not significantly affect variety preferences (actual time in relationship: \( F(1, 135) = 2.97, p = .09 \); all other \( p \)'s > .24).
particularly strong effect on variety preferences within the context of that specific relationship, emphasizing the value of studying choices for joint-consumption in relationship contexts.

**STUDY 5: WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR A MORE VERSUS LESS VARIED EXPERIENCE**

Study 5 tests our predictions in a different way. Rather than how much variety consumers choose between activities to do with their relationship partner, we measured willingness to pay for a single more or less varied joint experience. Participants read about a cruise vacation they could take with their partner, and we varied whether this cruise was described as offering a more or less varied experience.

Consistent with our prior findings, we expected that how much participants would be willing to pay more for the cruise vacation when it offered more versus less variety would depend on where they see themselves in the course of their relationship. When relationships seem newer (where more future time should be perceived ahead), willingness to pay should be higher for the more varied cruise vacation. When relationships seem older (where less future time should be perceived ahead), in contrast, willingness to pay should be higher for the less varied cruise vacation.

**Design and Method**

One hundred and thirty-eight Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 31 years, 44% female, 38% married, mean relationship length = 6.90 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (relationship: new vs. old) X 2 (variety: high vs. low) between-subjects design.
First, similar to study 3, we manipulated how long participants felt their relationship had lasted by asking them to describe how this time was short versus long: “Describe how the length of your relationship is a short [long] amount of time.”

Second, we asked participants to imagine taking a cruise vacation with their significant other. In the high variety condition, the cruise was described as offering more varied experiences: “The cruise package offers different types of island excursions, different dining options, and different opportunities to interact with people.” In the low variety condition, the cruise was described as offering less varied experiences: “The cruise package offers similar types of island excursions, similar dining options, and similar opportunities to interact with people.” This type of manipulation has been used in prior work to influence the perceived variety of focal activities (Etkin and Ratner 2012).

All participants indicated how much they would be willing to pay for the cruise vacation (open-ended, in dollars). Willingness to pay was log-transformed to stabilize for a non-normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test: \( p < .001 \)).

**Results**

A 2 (new vs. old relationship) X 2 (high vs. low variety) ANOVA on willingness to pay revealed only the predicted interaction (\( F(1, 134) = 9.63, p < .01; \) figure 3). As expected, when led to see their relationship as newer, participants reported higher willingness to pay for the

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6 Pretest results (\( N = 140 \)) showed that participants felt their relationship had lasted for more time (“Please indicate your perception of the length of your relationship: 1 = Very short, 7 = Very long”) in the old (vs. new) relationship condition (\( M_{\text{old}} = 4.66 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{new}} = 3.93; F(1, 136) = 8.12, p < .01 \)).

7 Pretest results (\( N = 70 \)) showed that the cruise vacation seemed more varied (1 = Very little variety, 7 = A lot of variety) in the high versus low variety condition (\( M_{\text{high}} = 5.37 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{low}} = 4.57; F(1, 68) = 5.65, p < .05 \)).

8 This interaction held controlling for age, gender, marital status, and how long participants had been in the relationship (\( F(1, 130) = 8.94, p < .01 \)), and only marital status had an independent effect (\( F(1, 130) = 4.09, p < .05 \); all other covariates \( p \)'s > .12).
cruise package when it offered a more (vs. less) varied experience (\(M_{\text{high variety}} = 3.02 \) [$1420.81] vs. \(M_{\text{low variety}} = 2.76 \) [$748.34]; \(F(1, 134) = 6.39, p < .05\)). This pattern reversed, however, when participants were led to see their relationship as older. In this case, they reported higher willingness to pay for the cruise package when it offered a less (vs. more) varied experience (\(M_{\text{low variety}} = 2.95 \) [$1343.42] vs. \(M_{\text{high variety}} = 2.76 \) [$918.13]; \(F(1, 134) = 3.45, p < .07\)).

**Discussion**

Study 5 provides convergent support for our theorizing by showing that how long consumers feel they have been in a relationship affects their willingness to pay for a more versus less varied joint experience. While seeing relationships as newer increased the value of a cruise vacation that offered a more varied experience, seeing relationships as older increased the value of a cruise vacation that offered a less varied experience.

Note that whereas studies 1-4 identified a decrease in variety preferences as relationships seemed to have lasted more time (and had less perceived future time ahead), study 5 separately compares preferences for more versus less variety when relationships seem newer versus older. The findings show that people preferred a more varied experience to a less varied experience when their relationship seemed newer, but preferred a less varied experience to a more varied experience when their relationship seemed older. Thus, not only does where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship affect how much variety they choose among activities done with their partner (i.e., a main effect; studies 1-4), but it also affects the relative value of more versus less variety within a single joint-experience (i.e., an interaction; study 5).
STUDY 6: UNDERLYING ROLES OF EXCITEMENT AND CALM

Study 6 examines the proposed underlying process. We have argued that perceiving more future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., because the relationship seems newer) increases the value of exciting experiences, whereas perceiving less future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., because the relationship seems older) increases the value of calming experiences. This shift in valued emotions, in turn, affects how much variety consumers prefer when deciding what to do with their partner. In particular, when people perceive much future time ahead of their relationship, the desire for excitement should increase preferences for more varied joint-experiences. When people perceive limited future time ahead of their relationship, in contrast, the desire for calm should increase preferences for less varied joint-experiences.

To test these predictions, participants read about a restaurant they could dine at with their relationship partner, and we varied whether the restaurant was described as offering a more or less varied experience. We predicted that when they perceived more future time ahead of their relationship, participants would be more interested in going to the restaurant when it offered a more varied experience, driven by a greater value for excitement. When they perceived less future time ahead, in contrast, participants should be more interested in going to the restaurant when it offered a less varied experience, driven by a greater value for calm.

Study 6 also addresses several potential alternative explanations. First, rather than feelings of excitement and calm, one could argue that the effects are driven by learning and preference uncertainty. People sometimes choose variety to facilitate learning and reduce preference uncertainty (Kahn and Lehman 1991; Pessemier 1978; Simonson 1990) and one could argue that when consumers see more future time ahead of a relationship, they choose more
variety to learn about their partners’ preferences. Second, one could argue the effects are driven by impression management concerns. People sometimes choose variety to manage others’ impressions (Ratner and Kahn 2002), and one could argue that when consumers see more future time ahead of a relationship, they choose more variety to make a positive impression on their partner. Third, one could argue that the effects are driven by perceived age. This perspective would suggest that relationship time perceptions makes people feel younger (or older), which changes the value of exciting versus calming experiences and corresponding variety preferences. To address these possibilities, we measured participants’ uncertainty regarding their partners’ preferences, concerns with impression management, and feelings of youth, and examine whether they drive the observed effects.

**Design and Method**

One hundred and thirty Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 31 years, 48% female, 39% married, mean relationship length = 6.66 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (future time: short vs. long) X 2 (variety: high vs. low) between-subjects design.

First, similar to study 3, we manipulated how much future time participants’ perceived ahead of their relationship by asking them to describe how this future time was short versus long: “Describe how the future time ahead of your relationship is a short [long] amount of time.”

Second, we asked participants to imagine going out to dinner with their significant other. Similar to study 5, in the high variety condition, the restaurant was described as offering a more

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9 Pretest results (N = 64) showed that participants felt their relationship had more future time ahead of it (“How much future time does your relationship have ahead of it?” 1 = *Very little time*, 7 = *A lot of time*) in the long (vs. short) future time condition ($M_{\text{long}} = 6.51$ vs. $M_{\text{short}} = 5.44$; $F(1, 62) = 9.71, p < .01$).
varied experience: “You are considering a restaurant that offers a menu of different food items, attracts a diverse crowd, and plays different types of music.” In the low variety condition, the restaurant was described as offering a less varied experience: “You are considering a restaurant that offers a menu of similar food items, attracts a consistent crowd, and plays similar types of music.” All participants then indicated how likely they were to take their significant other to this restaurant (1 = Not very likely, 7 = Very likely).

Third, we measured the hypothesized process (on 7-point scales). Two measures captured how much participants valued excitement in their relationship (“How important is it for you to feel excitement in your relationship?” and “How much do you value feeling excitement in your relationship?” $r = .89$). Two measures captured how much participants valued calm in their relationship (“How important is it for you to feel calm in your relationship?” and “How much do you value feeling calm in your relationship?” $r = .76$). These blocks were presented in a randomized order.

Fourth, to test potential alternative explanations, participants indicated their agreement with several statements (all on seven-point scales; 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree): learning and preference uncertainty (“I have much to learn about my relationship partner”), impression management (“I am concerned about what my relationship partner thinks of me” and “It is important that I make a good impression on my partner”), and psychological age (“I feel young”).

Results

Variety preferences. A 2 (future time) X 2 (variety) ANOVA on interest in the restaurant
revealed only the predicted interaction ($F(1, 126) = 9.23, p < .01$; figure 4). As expected, when they perceived more future time ahead of their relationship, participants were more willing to take their partner to dinner at the restaurant when it offered a more (vs. less) varied experience ($M_{\text{high variety}} = 5.75$ vs. $M_{\text{low variety}} = 5.21$; $F(1, 126) = 3.43, p < .07$). This pattern reversed, however, when participants perceived less future time ahead of their relationship. In this case, they were more likely to take their partner to dinner at the restaurant when it offered a less (vs. more) varied experience ($M_{\text{low variety}} = 6.00$ vs. $M_{\text{high variety}} = 5.22$; $F(1, 126) = 5.87, p < .05$).

**Underlying process.** Our theorizing suggests a moderated mediation model with excitement and calm as simultaneous mediators. We used biased-corrected bootstrapping to generate 95% confidence intervals around the indirect effects of excitement and calm, where successful mediation occurs if the confidence intervals exclude zero (Hayes 2009).

Results support the proposed process. Perceiving more future time ahead of their relationship led participants to prefer the more (vs. less) varied restaurant option by increasing the value of excitement ($ab = .14$; 95% CI: .006 to .43). Calmness did not play a role in this case ($ab = -.08$; 95% CI: -.30 to .02). Further, perceiving less future time ahead of their relationship led participants to prefer the less (vs. more) varied restaurant option by increasing the value of calm ($ab = -.13$; 95% CI: -.35 to -.02). Excitement did not play a role in this case ($ab = .01$; 95% CI: -.08 to .14).

**Alternative explanations.** Perceiving more (vs. less) future time ahead of their relationship did not affect how much participants felt they had to learn about their partner ($M_{\text{long future}} = 3.87$ vs. $M_{\text{short future}} = 3.75$; $F < 1$), concern about their partners’ opinion ($M_{\text{long future}} = 4.27$ vs. $M_{\text{short future}} = 4.32$; $F < 1$), interest in making a good impression ($M_{\text{long future}} = 5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{short future}} = 5.17$; $F < 1$), and the likelihood of breaking up ($M_{\text{long future}} = 3.84$ vs. $M_{\text{short future}} = 3.65$; $F < 1$).

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10 The interaction held controlling for age, gender, marital status, and how long participants had been in the relationship ($F(1, 122) = 9.89, p < .01$), and none of the covariates had an independent effect ($F$’s < 1).
future = 5.29; F < 1), or feelings of youth (M_{long future} = 5.08 vs. M_{short future} = 4.68; F(1, 126) = 2.16, p > .14), and there were no interactions with variety condition. Moreover, the key variety-preference result persisted controlling for these perceptions (F(1, 121) = 13.35, p < .01), and adding these items as simultaneous mediators to the moderated mediation model described above did not change the results.\(^\text{11}\)

Discussion

Study 6 illustrates the process behind the observed effects. As predicted, perceiving more future time ahead of their relationship increased participants’ preference for the restaurant when it offered a more varied experience by enhancing how much they valued excitement in the relationship. Perceiving less future time ahead of their relationship, in contrast, increased participants’ preference for the restaurant when it offered a less varied experience by enhancing how much they valued calm in the relationship. Further, as expected, excitement did not play a role in variety preferences when participants perceived more future time ahead of their relationship, and calm did not play a role when participants perceived less future time ahead.

In addition to supporting our theorizing, the results cast doubt on several potential alternative explanations. We did not find effects of our manipulations on uncertainty regarding partner preferences, impression management concerns, or feelings of youth. While each of these factors may contribute to how much variety people want in some situations (perhaps when time in relationships is measured rather than manipulated), when choosing for joint-consumption, the

\(^{11}\)While the indirect effect of excitement in the long future time condition remained significant (ab = .14; 95% CI: .002 to .44), as did the indirect effect of calm in the short future time condition (ab = -.12; 95% CI: -.35 to -.003), the indirect effects associated with the potential alternative explanations were not significant.
relative value of feeling excitement versus calm in the relationship seems to be a stronger determinant of whether consumers prefer more versus less variety.

**STUDY 7: CONSEQUENCES FOR RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT**

Extending the findings presented thus far, study 7 examines consequences for relationship commitment. Because people are more committed to relationships when their needs are being met (Rusbult et al. 1998; Van Lange et al. 1997), we suggest that the (actual or perceived) variety among what consumers do with a partner should affect how committed they feel to that relationship. In particular, when relationships seem newer and excitement is valued, perceiving more variety in joint-consumption (which feels exciting) should increase commitment to the relationship. When relationships seem older and calm is valued, however, perceiving less variety in joint-consumption (which feels calming) should increase relationship commitment.

To test these predictions, we asked participants how long they felt they had been in their romantic relationship, how much variety they perceived among the activities they do with their partner, and how committed they were to the relationship. We predicted that among relationships that seemed newer, perceiving more variety among joint-activities would be associated with greater relationship commitment, whereas among relationships that seemed older, perceiving less variety among joint-activities would be associated with greater relationship commitment.

**Design and Method**

One hundred and thirty-five Mechanical Turk panelists (mean age = 29 years, 39% married, mean relationship = 6.38 years) in a committed romantic relationship participated in
exchange for payment. Two participants reported distractions and were excluded from further analysis ($M = 133$).

First, we asked participants how long their relationship seemed to have lasted (“How long do you feel you have been in this relationship?” $1 = \text{Very short amount of time}, 7 = \text{Very long amount of time}$). Second, we asked them how much variety they perceived among what they do with their partner (“How much variety is there among the activities you and your partner do together?” $1 = \text{Very little variety}, 7 = \text{A lot of variety}$). Third, we measured relationship commitment using the 7-item commitment scale from Rusbult’s investment model (Rusbult et al. 1998). Sample items include: “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner,” “I want our relationship to last for a very long time,” and “I want our relationship to last forever” ($1 = \text{Do not agree at all}, 7 = \text{Agree completely}; \alpha = .88$).

**Results**

Regressing relationship commitment on how long the relationship seemed, perceived variety among joint-activities (both mean-centered), and their interaction revealed a main effect of how long the relationship seemed ($\beta = .19, t(130) = 4.01, p < .001$), qualified by the predicted interaction ($\beta = -.11, t(130) = -3.43, p = .001$; figure 5). To explore the nature of this interaction, we performed spotlight analyses ±1SD from the mean of how long the relationship seemed.

Supporting our reasoning, among participants in relationships that seemed newer (-1SD), perceiving more variety among what they did with their partner was linked to higher relationship commitment ($M_{\text{high variety}} = 6.31$ vs. $M_{\text{low variety}} = 5.54$; $\beta = .25, t(130) = 3.07, p < .01$). Among participants in relationships that seemed older (+1SD), however, the opposite occurred. For these people, perceiving less variety among what they did with their partner was linked to higher
relationship commitment ($M_{\text{low variety}} = 6.82$ vs. $M_{\text{high variety}} = 6.40$; $\beta = -0.13$, $t(130) = -1.85$, $p < 0.07$).\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Discussion}

These results are consistent with the notion that the variety among activities people do with a relationship partner shapes relationship commitment. Whether perceiving more variety among their joint-activities increased or decreased commitment depended on where participants saw themselves in the course of the relationship. Among individuals who perceived their relationship as newer, seeing joint-activities as more varied was associated with higher relationship commitment. Among individuals who perceived their relationship as older, in contrast, seeing joint-activities as less varied was associated with higher relationship commitment. Not only does where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship affect variety preferences for joint-consumption (studies 1-6), but it also affects how perceptions of variety influence relationship commitment (study 7).

Manipulating (rather than measuring) these constructs led to similar effects. We varied whether participants ($N = 135$) saw their relationship as newer versus older using the same response scales from studies 2 and 4. Then, they either imagined doing three more varied activities (i.e., cooking dinner at home, watching a movie, and going for a walk) or three less varied activities (i.e., cooking dinner at home, eating at a local restaurant, eating leftovers) with their partner, and reported their relationship commitment. A 2 (relationship) X 2 (variety) As would be expected, similar results emerged using the actual (vs. perceived) time participants had been in their relationship. Regressing relationship commitment on how long the relationship had lasted, perceived variety (both mean-centered), and their interaction revealed a main effect of how long the relationship had lasted ($\beta = .04$, $t(130) = 2.86$, $p < .01$), qualified by the predicted interaction ($\beta = -.02$, $t(130) = -1.90$, $p = .06$). We focused on perceived time instead of actual time in the main analysis because we manipulate these time perceptions in study 8.
ANOVA on relationship commitment revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 131) = 12.85, p < .001$). Consistent with results of study 7, when led to see the relationship as newer, considering more varied joint-activities increased relationship commitment ($M_{\text{high variety}} = 6.69$ vs. $M_{\text{low variety}} = 5.94; F(1, 131) = 6.81, p = .01$). When led to see the relationship as older, in contrast, considering less varied joint-activities increased relationship commitment ($M_{\text{low variety}} = 6.67$ vs. $M_{\text{high variety}} = 5.94; F(1, 131) = 6.06, p < .05$).

Overall then, whether measured or manipulated, where consumers see themselves in the course of their relationship moderates the relationship between perceived joint-activity variety and relationship commitment. To provide further evidence, and to increase the external validity of our findings, our final study turns to the field.

**STUDY 8: PICKING UP A ROSE**

Study 8 explores behavioral consequences of perceiving more or less variety among activities people do with their relationship partner in the field.

Particularly for men, giving flowers to one’s partner is a common way of showing care and devotion. Leveraging this tradition, we stopped men on the street, invited them to participate in a study and as thanks for participating, gave them a voucher for a free rose. The rose voucher was redeemable at a local flower shop located several blocks away, and thus required some time and effort to obtain. Because more committed people tend to spend more time on their partners (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult et al. 1998; Wieselquist et al. 1999), we reasoned that when led to see their relationship as newer, perceiving more variety among their joint-activities would make participants more likely to pick up the rose. When led to see their relationship as older, in
contrast, perceiving less variety among their joint-activities should make participants more likely to pick up the rose.

_Design and Method_

One hundred and thirty men in a committed romantic relationship were recruited midday in the downtown area of a large east coast city. These men were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (relationship: new vs. old) X 2 (variety: high vs. low) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated whether the relationship seemed newer versus older using the same response scales from studies 2 and 4. Second, we manipulated the perceived variety among participants’ joint-activities. In the high variety condition, they listed three different activities they had done with their partner in the past week. In the low variety condition, they listed three similar activities they had done with their partner in the past week. Third, once participants completed the survey, we surprised them with a voucher for a free rose to give to their significant other (see appendix). The voucher could only be redeemed at a flower shop located a few blocks away, and thus required time to do. We recorded whether participants picked up the rose.

_Results and Discussion_

A binary logistic regression of rose redemption on how long the relationship seemed, variety among joint-activities (both mean-centered), and their interaction revealed only the predicted interaction (β = -3.66, Wald = 5.25, p < .05; figure 6). As expected, the impact of joint-activity variety on participants’ tendency to pick up the rose was moderated by how long they felt the relationship had lasted. When led to see their relationship as newer, recalling more varied

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13 Due to how participants were recruited, demographic measures were not collected.
(vs. less) joint-activities increased participants’ tendency to pick up the rose ($M_{\text{high variety}} = 14.3\%$ vs. $M_{\text{low variety}} = 2.9\%; \chi^2 = 2.67, p = .10$). When led to see their relationship as older, in contrast, recalling less (vs. more) varied joint-activities increased participants tendency to pick up the rose ($M_{\text{low variety}} = 17.6\%$ vs. $M_{\text{high variety}} = 8.1\%; \chi^2 = 3.98, p < .05$).

These results underscore our theorizing and demonstrate consequences of this phenomenon for how consumers behave towards their relationship partner in the field. Men led to see a relationship as newer were more likely to pick up a rose for their partner after recalling more varied activities they had done together. Men led to see a relationship as older, in contrast, behaved the opposite way. These men were more likely to pick up a rose for their partner after recalling less varied activities they had done together. Where consumers see themselves in the course of their relationship thus moderates how variety affects feelings and behaviors towards relationships.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Variety plays a critical role in choice, and consumers often choose varied products and experiences for personal consumption (Ariely and Levav 2000; Menon and Kahn 1995; Ratner and Kahn 2002; Ratner et al. 1999; Simonson 1990). However, in addition to choosing more or less variety for the self, consumers can also choose more or less variety that they intend to consume with another person. While much is known about factors that influence variety preferences when choosing for individual-consumption, what might affect variety preferences when choosing for joint-consumption?
Eight studies demonstrate that when people choose for themselves and a relationship partner, how much variety they prefer depends on where they see themselves in the course of the relationship. When participants perceived their relationship as newer (or having more future time ahead of it), they chose more varied activities to do with their partner (studies 1-4) and preferred more variable joint-experiences (studies 5 and 6). When participants perceived their relationship as older (or having less future time ahead of it), they chose less varied activities to do with their partner and preferred less variable joint-experiences.

Studies 3 and 4 provide additional insight into these effects. Study 3 supports the expected links between past and future time perceptions in committed relationships. We argued that because past and future time in committed relationships are inversely related, both seeing relationships as older (vs. newer) and perceiving less (vs. more) future time ahead of relationships should reduce preferences for variety in joint-consumption. This is indeed what we found. Further, study 4 demonstrates that relationship time perceptions particularly influence feelings and decisions pertaining to that relationship. Seeing relationships as older (vs. newer) decreased the variety chosen for joint-consumption, but there was no comparable effect on the variety chosen for individual-consumption.

Study 6 provides direct evidence for the proposed underlying process while casting doubt on several alternative explanations. Building on prior work (Mogilner et al. 2012; 2011), we reasoned that an increased value for excitement would drive variety preferences when people perceive more future time ahead of a relationship, whereas an increased value for calm would drive variety preferences when people perceive less future time ahead of a relationship. Supporting this view, when participants perceived more future time ahead of their relationship, they preferred the more variable experience, driven by a greater value for excitement. When
participants perceived less future time ahead of their relationship, in contrast, they preferred the less variable experience, driven by a greater value for calm. Uncertainty regarding partners’ preferences, impression management, and feelings of youth could not explain the findings.

Finally, studies 7 and 8 demonstrate consequences of perceiving more or less variety in joint-consumption for how people feel and behave towards their relationship. In particular, study 7 examines feelings of relationship commitment, and study 8 focuses on consumers’ decision to spend time doing something nice for their partner. When the relationship seemed newer, perceiving more variety among their joint-activities enhanced participants’ commitment to the relationship and their likelihood of picking up a rose to give to their partner, but when the relationship seemed older, perceiving less variety among their joint-activities had these effects.

By utilizing different participant populations as well as multiple measures of variety preferences, the studies underscore the generalizability of our effects. Across studies the results held controlling for age, actual relationship length, gender, and marital status, and the effects did not differ for men and women, nor married and unmarried individuals. We also found similar results both measuring and manipulating how long individuals felt they had been in their relationship, as well as manipulating perceived future time ahead of the relationship, in both the lab and the field.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions. First, our work furthers understanding of consumer behavior in relationship contexts. In a recent review, Simpson et al. (2012) argues that “many of the consumer decisions that individuals make are directly or indirectly shaped by important other people with whom we have a relationship.” Yet, as these
authors state, decision-making research traditionally views individuals’ decisions as reflecting their “own personal attitudes, beliefs, and preferences.” By examining how relationship time perceptions shape individuals’ variety preferences for joint-consumption, our work provides insight into this under-studied area. Further, that we find different effects on choices for individual versus joint-consumption (study 4) underscores the importance of studying decision-making in relationship contexts.

Second, we demonstrate that established individual life course processes also manifest in committed relationship. Our findings show that perceived future time ahead of a committed relationship depends on where consumers see themselves in the course of that relationship. Relatedly, prior work shows that perceived future time ahead of one’s life primarily depends on age (Carstensen 2006; Carstensen et al. 1999), with consequences for personal judgment and decision-making. Williams and Drolet (2005), for example, showed that older people like emotional advertisements (particularly ones focused on avoiding negative emotions) more than younger people. Sinha and Wang (2013) found that older people behaved impulsively when they experience a lack of emotional attachment, whereas younger people behaved impulsively when they experience a lack of social connections. Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) found that older people preferred an ordinary (as opposed to extraordinary) experience more than younger people. Mogilner et al. (2012) showed that older people preferred a calming product, whereas younger people preferred an exciting product. Each of these findings is attributed, at least in part, to older people’s more limited future time perspective.

Going beyond these prior papers, the present research examines whether seeing a committed relationship as newer versus older (holding age and actual relationship length constant) affects what consumers want to do with their relationship partner. Further, whereas
prior work has examined evaluations of individual items (e.g., a single advertisement, a single experience, a single choice), we focus on variety preferences among multiple joint-experiences. Thus, while our work builds on recent aging research, we examine a novel context with novel predictions about consumers’ preferences.

Third, we extend prior work on how social factors shape variety preferences by demonstrating a novel way that other people influence variety-seeking. Past work has primarily focused on how choosing in front of others affects how much variety individuals choose for themselves (Ariely and Levav 2000; Kim and Drolet 2003; Laran 2010; Ratner and Kahn 2002). In addition, some work has explored how the amount of variety an individual chooses for himself differs from the amount of variety he chooses on behalf of another person (Laran 2010). However, to the best of our knowledge, situations where consumers make choices with the intention of sharing choice outcomes with another person have not been studied. By demonstrating when (and why) individuals choose more versus less variety for joint-consumption, our work begins to address this question.

Fourth, the last two studies suggest that the variety of activities people do, or perceive that they do, with a committed relationship partner affects how they feel and behave towards the relationship. Perceiving more variety among joint-activities enhanced relationship commitment when relationships seemed newer, but the opposite occurred when relationships seemed older. Given the importance of relationship quality for consumer wellbeing (Diener and Seligman 2002; Myers 2000; Ryan and Deci 2001), these results provide insight into the maintenance of romantic relationships.

Notably, these latter findings run somewhat counter to common wisdom that suggests more variety is better. Relationship blogs offer advice such as “the more variety, the better,”
“passion results from variety,” and “variety is the spice of love.” Moreover, academic scholars have also speculated that relationships benefit from incorporating more variety (Aronson and Linder 1965; Bao and Lyubomirsky 2013; Tsapelas, Aron, and Orbuch 2009). Our findings suggest that doing more varied things together would be particularly beneficial for relationships that have only lasted a short time. Relationships that have lasted for more time might benefit from couples doing less varied (but non-identical) things together, but this idea is worth further exploration.

**Practical Implications**

This work has implications for marketers. Marketers seem to have the intuition that consumers prefer a high amount of variety in what they do with relationship partners. Advertisements for vacation packages, for example, often highlight the many different types of experiences consumers can have together. Contrary to this belief, we find that consumers may prefer more or less variety in their joint-consumption experiences, depending on how long they feel they have been in the relationship. For example, studies 5 and 6 demonstrated that when their relationships seemed newer, participants were willing to pay more for a cruise, and more likely to go to a restaurant, when it offered a more (vs. less) varied experience. When their relationships seemed older, however, participants were willing to pay more for a cruise, and more likely to go to a restaurant, when it offered a less (vs. more) varied experience. Highlighting variety may thus be a more effective strategy when communicating with consumers in newer (as opposed to older) relationships.

Further, this work suggests marketers may be able to influence brand commitment by managing assortment variety within brand portfolios. Given that consumers form similar
relationships with brands as with people (Fournier 1998), the perceived length of consumers’
brand relationships may affect how much variety they want among their brand experiences. For
brand relationships that are (or seem) newer, consumers may value having more varied brand
experiences, whereas for brand relationships that are (or seem) older, they may value less varied
brand experiences. Prior work has identified several ways that such variety perceptions may be
altered, including highlighting similarities or differences among product offerings (Etkin and
Ratner 2012; Mogilner et al. 2008) and changing how assortments are organized (Broniarczyk et
al. 1998; Kahn and Wansink 2004; Redden 2008). These approaches could be used to highlight
the variety among product offerings to brand newcomers, but potentially downplay the variety
among product offerings to brand loyalists.

*Directions for Future Research*

These findings point to several directions for future research. First, future work could
further explore whether the effects extend beyond what consumers do with a partner to products
they jointly consume. As with choosing activities, consumers may also make purchases (e.g., a
car, a television, a pet) with the intention of consuming them with another person. Insofar as
these purchases can produce more or less variable experiences, where consumers see themselves
in the course of a relationship may affect their preferences for options offering more or less
variety. Relatedly, it could be interesting to see whether the effects extend to gifts given from
one partner to another. In a follow-up study, male participants \(N = 131\) reported their
willingness to pay for two rose bouquets (within-subjects), one with similar blossoms and one
with more varied blossoms, that they could give to their relationship partner. A repeated-
measures ANOVA only revealed an interaction \(F(1, 129) = 4.76, p < .04\). Willingness to pay
was higher for the more varied rose bouquet when relationships seemed newer, but higher for the less varied rose bouquet when relationships seemed older. We speculate that where consumers see themselves in the course of a relationship should affect preferences for variety among jointly consumed products and experiences, as well as products and experiences given as gifts from one partner to another.

Second, future work may examine whether the effects generalize beyond romantic relationships. Preliminary results suggest that they might. We asked 191 undergraduate students to think about a close friend with whom they frequently interact. They listed three similar or three different activities they had recently done with this friend, then reported how long they had been friends and how committed they were to the friendship. Regressing commitment on the length of the friendship, variety (both mean-centered), and their interaction only revealed an interaction ($\beta = -.18, t(188) = -2.53, p < .02$). Consistent with our prior findings, spotlight analyses at ±1SD from the relationship length mean showed that listing more varied activities increased commitment to newer friendships, but this pattern reversed for older friendships.14 While worth further testing, these results suggest our findings may generalize to relationships involving repeated interaction within a concentrated period of time (e.g., a week).

Third, future work could examine how the act of sharing more or less varied experiences impacts evaluation of those experiences. While this paper examined situations where individuals make choices with another person in mind, other work has explored how the act of sharing an experience affects its evaluation (Bhargave and Montgomery 2013; Raghunathan and Corfman 2006; Ramanathan and McGill 2007). Raghunathan and Corfman (2006), for example, showed that congruence of opinions (i.e., learning that another person feels the same way you do)

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14 Full results available upon request.
enhances enjoyment of the shared experience. Ramanathan and McGill (2007) found that sharing an experience led to greater coherence between individual opinions, and this greater coherence, in turn, improved retrospective evaluations. Building on these findings, future work could examine if the act of sharing more or less varied experiences affects how people feel about those experiences and each other.

Conclusion

Consumers often make choices for themselves and a relationship partner, but may prefer more or less variety among these choices. When people perceive more future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., because it feels new), they value excitement in the relationship and as a result, prefer more variety for joint-consumption. When people perceive less future time ahead of a relationship (e.g., because it feels old), in contrast, they value calmness in the relationship, and as a result, prefer less variety for joint-consumption. How much variety consumers choose to consume with a relationship partner thus depends on where they see themselves in the course of the relationship.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1
RANGE OF AGES AND RELATIONSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Relationship (years)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td>20-57 [9.18]*</td>
<td>.33-30.17 [6.18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3</td>
<td>19-63 [9.03]</td>
<td>.08-43.50 [6.83]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 4</td>
<td>18-56 [7.07]</td>
<td>.08-32.00 [5.71]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 5</td>
<td>18-67 [9.15]</td>
<td>.08-43.92 [7.41]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 6</td>
<td>19-66 [9.01]</td>
<td>.42-40.92 [7.71]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 7</td>
<td>19-64 [8.29]</td>
<td>.25-40.50 [6.61]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Standard deviations reported in brackets.

**Demographic information not collected due to nature of participant recruitment.
FIGURE 1
MANIPULATING PAST VERSUS FUTURE TIME
(STUDY 3)

FIGURE 2
CHOICE FOR JOINT VERSUS INDIVIDUAL-CONSUMPTION
(STUDY 4)
FIGURE 3
WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR A MORE VERSUS LESS VARIED CRUISE
(STUDY 5)

FIGURE 4
INTEREST IN A MORE VERSUS LESS VARIED RESTAURANT
(STUDY 6)
FIGURE 5

CONSEQUENCES FOR RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

(STUDY 7)

FIGURE 6

EFFECTS ON ROSE REDEMPTION

(STUDY 8)
APPENDIX

SAMPLE ROSE VOUCHER FOR STUDY 8

ROSE VOUCHER
Avanda Flowers
401 S. 16th St. (at Pine St.)
(215) 545-2338
M/Tu 12-6:30pm W-F 10-6:30pm

Present voucher to cashier to redeem your rose
Valid from 1/28 to 2/1 only