

## Introduction to the special issue bridging behavioral decision theory and social psychology

Judgments and choices are fundamental human behaviors that have been investigated from a variety of perspectives over many years. The Journal of Consumer Psychology has, in the past, drawn published papers that have examined decisions from a more social psychological point of view. Another perspective is the more cognitive psychological perspective that is well represented in the field of Behavioral Decision Theory. While the social psychological perspective and the cognitive psychological perspective clearly overlap, and differ from other more economics-based perspectives, there have been times in which the differences between behavioral decision theory (BDT) and social psychological researchers have made collaboration difficult. They differ in the questions they ask and in what counts as evidence to answer those questions. Behavioral decision theory researchers often focus on surprising behavioral effects that typically build off of deviations from economic norms. For instance, the most central BDT model is Prospect Theory, which accounts for loss aversion and decisions under uncertainty with an S-shaped value function. BDT looks for generalizations of behavior related to the task performed and the decision context in which the task occurs. By contrast, the articles that have been typically published in the Journal of Consumer Psychology focus on more on theories drawn from social psychology. In that focus, processes or constructs that alter judgments or choice such as moods and belief states are typically part of the psychological framework to be confirmed or disproved.

Given the differences between the two approaches it is appropriate to question why there should be a special issue of JCP attempting to bridge these two. The reason is apparent in these ten articles, eight of which were derived from over 31 articles submitted to the special issue, and two that fit the criteria for the special issues but were reviewed as regular articles. The papers bridge across methods, scan across constructs, and generate insights for both fields. They provide social psychological process accounts of BDT effects and identify novel BDT effects that are predicted by social psychological theory.

Below we briefly summarize the key ideas from these ten papers. We begin with four that bridge between the frameworks by providing insights into better individual or societal decision

making. After these follow three fine examples of review papers and then three outstanding examples of research that cross boundaries between BDT and social psychology.

1. The first prescriptive paper is by Keller, Loewenstein, Volpp and Harlam (2011). To encourage citizens to make decisions with long run personal and social benefits, such as willingness to be vaccinated against a contagious disease, the authors advocate what they call enhanced active choice. This process entails requiring a choice in which the losses attached to the socially undesirable choice are emphasized. In both laboratory and field settings they show that enhanced active choice works to encourage people to do what is in their long run best interest.
2. A second paper with significant social welfare implications is by Paolacci, Burson and Rick (2011). It is well known that the endowment effect discourages people from making decisions that entail losses from their current state. This paper shows that getting respondents to move from their endowed state is easier if they are asked to make an earlier choice of an intermediate alternative that reflects a minor shift from the current endowed state. The logic is that the intermediate option serves to weaken the original endowed reference point. Thus simply considering minor shifts from an original reference serves to weaken the inertial hold of that endowment.
3. The Yang, Hsee, Lui and Zhang (2011) paper provides further advice on how to make decisions that will be valued in the future. They define contexts in which focusing on a singular alternative generates more satisfying outcomes over comparing that alternative with others. They build their reasoning on the observation that initial choices are typically comparative while post choice evaluations of experiences and products are not. To the extent that comparative and non-comparative evaluations produce different evaluations, then it follows that using what they call subjective singularity will produce better

decisions when the later experience is also singular. They demonstrate this result with a number of clever experiments.

4. The idea that people are risk seeking in the loss domain and risk averse in the gain domain has been a hallmark prediction of Prospect Theory. Risk seeking follows from curvature in the value function in the negative domain. That curvature generates greater expected utility from a gamble over a sure thing with equivalent expected value. The Leonhardt, Keller and Pechmann (2011) paper proposes that avoiding risk of responsibility offers a more psychologically relevant account of why agents avoid certainty among aversive choices. In their experiments they demonstrate that subjective assessments of guilt and blame are lessened when chance or an intervening agency generates the harm. More relevant, a second group of experiments demonstrate that agents prefer procedures that allow chance or an intervening process to select those individuals to be harmed. These experiments show that responsibility aversion has an impact independent of the value function in Prospect Theory. Thus, this work provides a novel account of the value function's curvature in the negative domain. In addition, it has a strong ethical and social message. Parents, doctors, investment advisors and legislatures make decisions for others. The notion that one would prefer for nature or an intervening process to generate negative outcomes is reflected in our behavior, including, for example, the Hippocratic oath to abstain from doing harm. The Leonhardt, Keller and Pechmann (2011) study suggests that this self-protective instinct among agents may increase harm by encouraging decisions which allow other mechanism to carry the responsibility.
5. The Touré-Tillery and Fishbach (2011) paper examines changes in the effort expended to achieve a desired outcome. There has been substantial research demonstrating that goal pursuit generally increases with closeness to a goal. This paper reviews moderators to that general effect, pointing particularly to the psychological factors that limit the goal gradient effect, such as multiple goals or attention to effort that signals progress. Then the paper focuses on the desire to do things right in the course of goal pursuit either through careful work or compliance with norms. These they demonstrate carry a U-shaped response that is strongest at the beginning and end of a task, but slacks off in the middle. The ethical implication of this result is important and novel, as it predicts greater willingness to cheat in the middle over the beginning or the end of progress toward a goal.
6. Bob Wyer's (2011) review paper examines ways in which decision processes carry over across tasks. As the past editor of JCP, Bob Wyer is firmly established the social psychology camp. He presents work that illustrates ways in which considerations of cognitive efficiency, accessible knowledge and past experience alter later processes. The compendium of effects he summarizes are sufficiently surprising and are situated in important social or behavioral phenomenon to make them very appropriate as an example of an outstanding social psychologist transitioning into behavioral decision making. For example, Wyer reviews work showing that a processing mindset can either focus on which to choose or whether to choose, and that mindset then carries over to later activities. These studies demonstrate that those having completed forced choices are more likely take away at least one of a number of half-price options as a reward at the end of a study. Even more surprising is the finding that comparisons of non-preference attributes increase the likelihood choosing the best item, rather than rejecting all. These are just a few of the surprising results in this review that spans a large number of studies by Bob Wyer and his co-authors.
7. The Shu and Peck (2011) paper reviews nine established moderators to the endowment effect. It also replicates these studies and adds process measures to better understand what is happening. The two mediators tested are psychological ownership, the extent to which one feels bonded to the endowed item, and affective reaction, the sense of how much one would lose. In doing so, they provide a comprehensive review of moderators to the endowment effect and establish the existence of two mediators that make sense of the pattern of those results.
8. Scott Rick's (2011) paper relating loss aversion to neuroeconomics provides a particularly strong bridge between behavioral decision theory and psychology. After all, brain activity measures by fMRI technology are both observable behavior and evidence of processes occurring within the brain. The consistent theme from the paper is that there remain a number of neurological and physiological measures that can resolve issues related to the determinants of loss aversion.
9. Berger and Shiv (2011) examine the surprisingly robust relationships between the need for distinctiveness and the need for rewards. Particularly among those who value distinctiveness, they show that cuing distinctiveness generates a motive to generate rewards. Then they show the reverse effect where cuing personal needs increases the selection of more distinctive products. Finally, they demonstrate cross-domain satiation where cuing sexual need increases the choice of distinctive products except where that need is satiated by a candy bar. This link between preference for unique products and the motivational reward system makes clear that the traditional relationship between preferences and goals needs to be reconceptualized.
10. Finally, the Chatterjee, Roy, and Malshe (2011) paper provides evidence for a process account of the attraction effect. It has been known for a long time that the share of a target brand can be increased by adding a decoy that is dominated by the target but not by its competitor. What is less well known is that the general location of the target alters the magnitude of the attraction effect. For example, the attraction effect is generally stronger when the

high quality, high priced brand rather than low quality, low priced brand is the target. Research by Heath et al. (2000) demonstrated a reversal of that generalization among low income respondents, supporting the thesis that decoys in preferred region of the space would have more impact. A parallel result emerges in the Chatterjee, Roy and Malshe (2011) paper. They manipulate regulatory focus by having subjects write an essay on past successes (promotion focus) or on obligations and duties (prevention focus). Respondents then make choices between products that pit a promotional feature against a prevention feature. It is no surprise that regulatory focus encourages choice of products whose features match the regulatory focus. What is novel is the finding that the attraction effect is strongest when the decoy is in the region of that matches the manipulated regulatory focus. From a process perspective, when a match occurs subjects are more likely to notice the dominance and shift choice to the target. Thus, this paper combines research on regulatory focus with the attraction effect and provides support

for an attentional process that moderates the attraction effect.

We are pleased by the strong response to our call for papers and grateful to the work of the JCP reviewers and the authors in refining their manuscripts. We hope this volume will encourage the readers of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* to expand their research domain to include ideas and methods championed by those studying behavioral decision making. For their part we also hope that BDT researchers include more social psychological constructs and processes to account for their phenomena.

## References

- Heath, T., Ryu, G., Chatterjee, S., Mccarthy, M., Mothersbaugh, D., Milberg, S., & Gaeth, G. (2000, Dec). Asymmetric competition in choice and the leveraging of competitive disadvantages. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, 291–308.

Joel Huber  
John Payne