The Chooser's Curse: the Ability to Choose Increases Satiation

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Five studies show that enjoyment drops faster when people choose what to consume. This happened for music and art, and did not depend on whether the choice set was larger or varied. Process evidence indicated that choosing triggers thoughts about the repetitive nature of the ongoing consumption.

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outcome ($F(2, 213) = 9.1, p < .001$). Specifically, participants who were forced to receive $53.00 were significantly happier ($M = 4.1$) than those who were given a choice ($M = 3.6; t(143) = 2.3, p = .02$) and those who were forced to donate ($M = 3.6; t(143) = 2.6, p = .009$). Analysis on our choice satisfaction measure revealed the same pattern of results (all $p’s < .001$). Participants in the free choice condition did not significantly differ in happiness ($t(75) = .41, p = ns$) or choice satisfaction ($t(75) = 0.72, p = ns$) from those in the imposed donation condition.

Together these studies demonstrate evidence that imposing a selfish option on an individual can lead to greater positive affect and post outcome satisfaction than letting people choose between a selfish and prosocial option. When a selfish option is imposed, individuals can enjoy the pleasure from that option without feeling interpersonal conflict. One open question is why imposed prosocial behavior fails to raise happiness, as it likewise reduces the conflict between selfishness and prosocial behavior. It is possible that when forced, individuals do not feel causal and responsible for the good deed and this feeling of ownership of the behavior is what produces happiness. Yet choosing prosocial behavior is no better for happiness because of the inherent conflict of the choice. Future research will seek to resolve these open questions.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

There are only four places to have lunch near my office. I am regularly reminded of this painful fact every day around noon when I decide where to eat lunch. Although I pick whichever option sounds the best that day, the problem is that I am quite satiated with all of them. I often wonder if this daily act of deliberating and choosing heightens my satiation. In other words, would I be better off if someone simply told me where to eat lunch each day? Similarly, would I get less bored with my music if I used a shuffle feature rather than selecting each song myself? Generally speaking, do people get more satiated when they choose, or when others choose for them?

Common sense dictates that letting people choose should increase enjoyment. In fact, a core tenet of economics is that consumers maximize utility, and what they prefer can be determined from what they choose (called revealed preference). Therefore, in a repeated consumption setting, people know when their satiation is growing with an item and switch to a more preferred alternative. Only the consumer would be privy to their moment-to-moment preferences; hence, selections from any other source should be more satiating.

The present research posits that repeated choosing instead increases satiation because it makes the repetition more salient. Recent research has identified perceived repetition as an important antecedent of satiation (Redden, 2008). Kahn and Wansink (2004) similarly found that people expected to enjoy M&M candies more (and indeed ate more) when the variety of colors were easier to visually perceive. People also recovered faster from satiation when reminded of the variety of other things they had also recently consumed (Galak, Redden, and Kruger, 2009). These findings all indicate that satiation depends on the extent to which people notice the variety and repetition of what they consume.

This research proposes that choosing affects perceptions of repetition by acting as a recurring reminder that one is repeatedly having more of the same thing. Given the aforementioned work identifying perceptions of repetition as a key driver of satiation, highlighting the fact that an experience is increasingly repetitive will make it subsequently more satiating. Alternatively, if a sequence is not chosen but instead exogenously determined (e.g., random), the repetitive nature of the consumption would be less salient. This leads to the prediction that an individual will satiate more with a sequence they choose versus a randomly selected sequence. That is, the enjoyment for people allowed to choose will decline faster with repeated consumption, and eventually be less than for those not allowed to choose. Of course, this is not saying that choosing will increase satiation in all cases (e.g., a food allergen or a hated song).

Five empirical studies confirm these predictions. All of the studies have a similar setup: some participants choose their own sequence while others receive a random sequence, and all participants rate their enjoyment at periodic intervals. Study 1 shows that participants who chose which song to hear on each trial satiated faster than those for whom each song was randomly selected. Study 2 establishes the general nature of this effect by extending it to art, and showing that it does not depend on the number of available options, or whether those options vary on each trial. Study 3 provides mediation evidence that choosing triggers thoughts of repetition that subsequently lead to more satiation. Studies 4 and 5 give further support to the proposed process by showing that cuing judgments of repetition makes a random sequence as satiating as a chosen one, and the satiating effect of choosing disappears if all of the choices are made before consumption begins. Overall, the studies provide consistent evidence that letting a person choose their own consumption sequence satiates them faster because it highlights the repetitive nature of the experience.

This research adds a new negative effect to the choice literature, and highlights repeated consumption as an important moderator. This research also deepens our theoretical understanding of the processes underlying satiation. Choosing increases satiation because it encourages thoughts of repetition. This proposed process highlights the critical role of self-reflective thoughts in determining how satiated one feels, and establishes choosing as a novel antecedent. By exploring choosing and satiation, this work joins two literature streams not typically considered together, and demonstrates their interplay.

Widespread choice in consumers’ everyday lives may help explain the ubiquity of satiation, and repeated choosing may be necessary to see the full effects of choosing on satisfaction.

**Turning the Page: The Impact of Choice Closure on Satisfaction**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

When moving from a difficult period to another stage of life people sometimes use metaphors such as “turning the page”, “closing the door”, or “turning the back”. These metaphors combine the physical act of closing with the psychological state of ending a challenging time, reflecting people’s intent to make a new start. In this paper we suggest that such metaphors can play an important role in the domain of choices. We show that the physical act of closing embodied in these metaphors can psychologically bring a difficult decision process to an end and allow people to focus on their experience with the decision outcome. We refer to this process as *choice closure*.

We investigate a specific case of difficult decisions—choices made from extensive sets (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000). Research has shown that an increase in the number of options to compare during the decision process enhances regret and decreases the attractiveness of the chosen option relative to the forgone options in the post-decisional phase (Brenner, Rottenstreich, and Sood, 1999; Cameron, Wertebroch, and Zeelenberg, 2003; Hsee and Leclerc, 1998; Inbar,otti, and Hanko, forthcoming). By metaphorically and thus psychologically ending the decision process, choice closure can inhibit...