

Weighing your options? Thinking of less supportive relationships leads to wanting more choice

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(Phys.org)—People who view their relationships as secure have less need to consider many options when making choices about purchases, a new University of Michigan study shows.

In general, people like having options. However, having too many options can lead to negative decision [consequences](#), such as delaying making a choice or deciding not to choose, U-M researchers say.

"Although having more choice appears good in theory, more choice may lead to lower decision quality and less [satisfaction](#) with the chosen option," said Oscar Ybarra, U-M professor of [psychology](#) and the study's

lead author.

Ybarra and colleagues examined how relationships can influence a person's decisions, especially as it relates to the costs associated with choices that offer few or many options.

Through two experiments, they found that supportive relationships increased [feelings](#) of security and [calmness](#), which lessen the appeal of wanting more options when choosing.

On the other hand, non-supportive relationships provided little or no security, leading people to separate themselves from others. This, Ybarra said, elevated the person's need to be flexible when making decisions and thus the appeal of options when choosing.

The first experiment separated 133 participants in groups: those who were instructed to think about supportive relationships, another to consider non-supportive relationships, and another (control) to think about an object the person owns but isn't important.

Participants then were presented with four scenarios in which they would buy a new [cell phone](#): the company decides on the phone for the consumer; for a \$5 fee, the person can select from three of nine available models; for a \$10 fee, six of nine available models could be considered; and for \$15, all nine models would be available to choose from.

Participants in the non-supportive and control groups—about 60 percent of the sample—wanted more choice in [making decisions](#) even if they had to pay the higher price. Fewer participants in the supportive group chose the \$15 option (48 percent) when compared with the other groups.

In the second experiment, 50 adults assessed their choices for hiking

boots and were placed in groups where they were either reminded of a supportive or non-supportive relationship. In the decision task, they could choose to visit a store that carried five styles of boots, and the store was 11 minutes away; another store had nine styles but was 19 minutes away; a third had 14 styles and was 29 minutes; and a fourth store carried 20 styles of boots but was 41 minutes away.

Participants also indicated the importance of the choice, how confident they were in finding the best pair of boots, and their knowledge and familiarity with hiking boots.

Most participants in the supportive relationship condition chose the stores with the fewer boot styles and time commitment, 43 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Only 10 percent selected the stores that had more choices and involved more time commitment.

For the non-supportive group, 35 percent of [participants](#) opted for the stores with more choices and time commitment.

Researchers said the results also indicated that people reminded of supportive relationships described themselves as being calm and secure, feelings that were associated with the decrease in the appeal of [choice](#).

More information: [pss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/ab ...
t/0956797612440458v1](https://pss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/0956797612440458v1)

Provided by University of Michigan

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