



# Do maximizers maximize for others? Self-other decision-making differences in maximizing and satisficing



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## ABSTRACT

The current research provides initial evidence of self-other decision-making differences between maximizers and satisficers by focusing on how they make the tradeoff between the value and the effort an option requires when deciding for themselves and for others. Study 1 demonstrates that maximizers prefer a high-value but effort-consuming option both for themselves and for others, whereas satisficers prefer that option for others but not for themselves. Study 2 further shows that to attain high value with a choice, maximizers not only are willing to expend more effort themselves but also advise others to expend more effort; however, satisficers choose to expend less effort themselves but do not advise others to do so. In conclusion, the current research contributes to the relevant literature by demonstrating that maximizers maximize for both themselves and others, whereas satisficers satisfice for themselves but maximize for others.

## 1. Introduction

In choice situations, people vary in the extent to which they aspire for the best. Schwartz et al. (2002) proposed that individuals who expend substantial effort for the best option are maximizers, and those who expend less effort for a good-enough option are satisficers. Following Schwartz et al.' (2002) groundbreaking work, a large amount of theoretical (e.g., Bruine de Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007; Dalal, Diab, Zhu, & Hwang, 2015) and experimental (e.g., Dar-Nimrod, Rawn, Lehman, & Schwartz, 2009; Luan & Li, 2017b; Ma & Roese, 2014; Mao, 2016; Shiner, 2015; Weaver, Danilowski, Schwarz, & Cottone, 2015) work has continued to investigate maximizing. These cumulative studies have greatly enriched our understanding of maximizing; however, nearly all of them focus on situations in which maximizers and satisficers make decisions for themselves and ignore situations in which the decision target is somebody else. The question remains concerning how maximizers and satisficers make decisions for others. In this article, we investigate the self-other decision-making differences between maximizers and satisficers to address this important gap in the relevant literature.

Making decisions for others is very common in daily life. Studies on self-other decision-making show that making decisions for others is not always the same as making decisions for oneself. For example, Iyengar and Lepper (2000) found that choosing from a large set of options leaves individuals less satisfied than choosing from a small set of options, but Polman (2012) later observed the reverse of this choice-

overload phenomenon among individuals making decisions for others: Individuals were more satisfied with a large assortment size in a situation where they decided on another's behalf. Similarly, the self-other decision-making asymmetry appears in many other decision-making phenomena, such as desirability-feasibility preferences (Baskin, Wakslak, Trope, & Novemsky, 2014; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013), omission bias (Zikmund-Fisher, Sarr, Fagerlin, & Ubel, 2006), confirmatory bias (Jonas, & Frey, 2003), the compromise effect (Chang, Chuang, Cheng, & Huang, 2012), and predecisional distortion (Polman, 2010). Thus, because self-other differences are common in decision-making, does self-other decision-making differ between maximizers and satisficers?

To answer this question, we investigate the self-other decision-making differences between maximizers and satisficers by focusing on their desire to maximize the value of a choice and the effort they spend to attain this value. In contrast to satisficers, maximizers expend substantial effort to obtain the best possible results when they make decisions for themselves (Cheek & Schwartz, 2016; Luan & Li, 2017a). For example, past research has found that maximizers include a greater number of alternatives in their consideration set (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2009; Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006; Nenkov, Morrin, Schwartz, Ward, & Hulland, 2008), make more comparisons among options (Schwartz et al., 2002), conduct more background research prior to making choices (Iyengar et al., 2006; Nenkov et al., 2008), and take more time when making decisions (Chowdhury et al., 2009; Misuraca, & Teuscher, 2013; Nenkov et al., 2008; Schwartz et al.,

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2002). Previous research has described various distinctions between maximizers and satisficers; however, we choose two characteristics—the desire for the best and the effort expended to attain the best—to distinguish between them in this initial exploration, for these are the two most salient characters of maximizers (see Schwartz et al., 2002). Focusing on these two characteristics, we pose our research question as follows: When deciding for others, do maximizers aim for the best regardless of the effort required (as they do for themselves), and do satisficers prefer a less valued but effortless option (as they do for themselves)?

Although related research is scarce, a few past studies have provided indirect support for the self-other decision-making differences between maximizers and satisficers. Three main perspectives in the findings (on which we will elaborate in the following paragraphs) are as follows: (1) Randomly chosen decision makers focus on the value of an option rather than the effort required to attain value when making decisions for others but not for themselves (Baskin et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2013). (2) In contrast to satisficers, maximizers expend substantial effort to maximize the value of an option when making decisions for themselves (Cheek & Schwartz, 2016; Luan & Li, 2017a). (3) Even if the decision targets are themselves, maximizers still regard others' opinions as more important than their counterparts do (i.e., satisficers; Iyengar et al., 2006; Schwartz et al., 2002; Weaver et al., 2015).

Research in the self-other decision-making literature provides evidence that when making decisions for others, randomly chosen decision makers tend to focus on the value of their choices rather than the effort spent to obtain value. For example, Lu et al. (2013, Experiment 1a) found that when having to choose between a delicious (i.e., the attribute that represents the value) but far away (i.e., the attribute that represents the means to obtain the value) restaurant and an okay but near restaurant, participants were more likely to choose the former for others but the latter for themselves. Baskin et al. (2014) also found that as a gift giver, individuals preferred a high-value gift, although it might require substantial effort to attain value (e.g., a high-quality video game that needs many hours to learn how to play). As a gift receiver, individuals actually preferred the gift whose value was “good enough” and easy to attain (e.g., a middle-quality video game that is easy to play).

However, this pattern observed among average decision makers may not apply to maximizers. As previously discussed, the preferences for a high-value but effort-consuming choice also apply to maximizers when they make decisions for themselves—they expend substantial effort to maximize the value of their choice. In sum, it appears that maximizers making decisions for themselves are somewhat similar to average decision makers making decisions for others: They both focus on the value of their choices rather than the effort spent to attain value.

Essentially, the reason that people vary in making decisions for themselves and for others is because they hold different perspectives when making decisions for themselves and for somebody else. However, according to the literature on maximization, maximizers may not be the same as average decision makers. Maximizers are the type of decision makers who are good at viewing decisions from others' perspective, even when the decision targets are themselves. Maximizers rely more on external criteria to make their decisions (Iyengar et al., 2006; Parker, Bruine de Bruin, & Fischhoff, 2007), are more sensitive to social comparisons (Schwartz et al., 2002), and use other individuals as the criteria to make their own decisions (Weaver et al., 2015). In sum, when making decisions for themselves, maximizers adopt the perspective of others to view themselves, just as average decision makers do when making decisions for others.

In this research, we assume that maximizing tendency moderates the pattern of self-other decision-making differences. Specifically, satisficers follow the pattern found in studies on randomly chosen decision makers: They focus on the value regardless of the effort required when they make decisions for others, and they settle for a good but less effort-requiring option for themselves. In contrast, as can be inferred

from previous paragraphs, maximizers focus on the value of a choice, regardless of the effort the choice requires, when deciding for both themselves and others.

## 2. Overview of the present studies

We conducted two studies to explore the self-other decision-making differences between maximizers and satisficers. In study 1, we presented maximizers and satisficers a decision-making scenario in which they had to make a tradeoff between the value of products and the effort expended to attain value both for themselves and for others. We hypothesize that maximizers prefer high-value but effort-consuming products for both themselves and others, but satisficers prefer these types of products more for others than for themselves. In Study 2, maximizers and satisficers were asked to decide for themselves or advise an anonymous student regarding the amount of effort to expend on a course presentation. Similar to Study 1, we hypothesize that maximizers not only are willing to expend more effort themselves but also advise others to expend more effort. However, satisficers choose to expend less effort themselves but do not advise others to do so.

## 3. Study 1

Study 1 was designed to explore whether maximizers and satisficers vary in making decisions for themselves and others. In this experiment, the participants were instructed to indicate their relative preference between two movie tickets both for themselves and for somebody else. The two tickets were designed as a high-value but effort-consuming option and a middle-value but effortless one. The hypothesis to be tested is that maximizers prefer the high-value but effort-consuming option for both themselves and others, but satisficers prefer that option more for others than for themselves.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants and design

A total of 79 students<sup>1</sup> (37 females, 42 males,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.39$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ) participated in this experiment in exchange for extra course credit. This experiment adopted a mixed design, with the decision target (self versus other) as the categorical within-subjects factor and maximizing tendency as the continuous between-subjects factor. The relative preference for the high-value option served as the dependent variable.

### 4.2. Procedure and materials

The participants were asked to imagine that they were choosing between a high-value but effort-consuming movie ticket (“Option A. Movie tickets to a brand-new movie that is premiering in your city. These tickets are only for the premier of the movie in a theater far from the school campus. Critics have called this a very exciting, well-done movie.”) and a middle-value but effortless one (“Option B. Movie tickets to a movie released several days ago in your city. These tickets can be redeemed for any theatre in the city, so you can choose the nearest theatre. Critics have said that the movie is good but might at times be somewhat boring.”). The decision scenario was based on a previous study conducted by Baskin et al. (2014). A pretest was conducted (see supplementary material) to examine whether the descriptions of the two options sufficiently represented a high-value (but

<sup>1</sup> Using G\*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), we determined that we required a sample of least 77 individuals to have sufficient power ( $1 - \beta > 0.80$ ) to detect a medium-sized effect ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ). Data collection ended on the day the minimum sample was obtained.

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