

THE ART OF CHOSING

ARTICLE

[The Paradox of Choice](#) is one of my favorite books of all time. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm a sucker for most books that, in one way or the other, tell us to go back to "the good old days," when making choices was easier. Sheena Iyengar thinks learning how to make choices is more important today than ever. She's one of the world's most prominent researchers in this field and conductor of the [famous jam study](#), in which shoppers could sample either 6 or 24 different varieties of jam at a grocery store, which led to six times more purchases when less jams were available.

Are you ready to chop some complexity out of your choices? Let's level up your inner decision-maker!

LESSON 1: YOU MUST FIND OUT HOW MUCH CHOICE YOU PERSONALLY NEED, SOMETHING THAT HEAVILY DEPENDS ON CULTURE, FOR EXAMPLE.

There are innumerable factors that influence any given choice you make. When we think about how we can change these, we usually try to answer the question “How can I maximize the amount of choice I have?” – because we assume that more choice is better. At least that’s how I try to answer it, because I grew up in the Western civilization. Here’s where it gets tricky: Not all of us need to maximize our freedom of choice to thrive. How much choice you need is highly individual.

One of the factors that determines how much choice you actually need is culture. It makes sense. Cultures that focus and promote individual freedom, as in Europe or the United States, produce people who thrive on being in charge. Eastern cultures are usually more focused on their collective entity, in which it feels more natural to have others make decisions for you. In a study where Asian-American and Anglo-American children were either given a toy to play with by their mothers or allowed to select a toy to play with themselves, the Asian kids played longer when their mom selected the toy, whereas the American kids enjoyed playing longer if they self-selected.

What might seem trivial when looking at kid's playing behaviors is not when it comes to life: In another study, the same two ethnic groups were given a math test before and after playing Space Quest, a game designed to improve their math skills. One group could choose their spaceship's color and name, another was given the most popular settings among the class. The American kids improved by 18% when they could choose themselves and not at all when they were denied the choice, whereas the Asian kids improved by 18% when they were given the settings, and only 11% if they had to decide. How much freedom of choice you need is not an easy one to answer for yourself, but you can bet that it's an important one to find out.

LESSON 2: SOME CHOICE IS BETTER THAN NONE, AND EVEN THE ILLUSION OF IT MAKES US HAPPIER.

Two famous studies among over 10,000 British, called the Whitehall studies, showed that employees with a higher salary tended to be healthier, despite having more stressful jobs. Those with the lowest pay grade had the highest likelihood of dying from heart disease. However, nobody who works there lives a life close to the poverty line, so what's the deal? With higher pay comes higher responsibility, but also more freedom to structure your work and tasks – and this makes people happier and healthier. Feeling like you're in charge is (to some extent, remember lesson 1) so important that even the perception of choice matters a great deal, regardless of how much you actually end up having.

For example, when new residents of a nursing home were given a suggested schedule of activities, along with being told they were “allowed” to visit other floors, they felt like their health was the staff’s responsibility, and they gave up on it. Telling a second group that everything was their choice made them much happier, even though technically both groups were free to do as they pleased.

LESSON 3: SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO HAVE OTHERS CHOOSE FOR YOU, BUT ONLY IF YOU'RE PROPERLY INFORMED.

Sometimes in life, we have to make really, really hard choices. For example, in the extreme situation of parents having to decide whether to keep their terminally ill children alive or not, parents can deal better with the decision to cease palliative care if it's initiated by the doctor – it puts less of a burden on their shoulders. However, while it ultimately is better to have someone make such a tough decision for you, it only makes you feel better if you're well-informed about it.

STUDY

In a study where participants read about the following three variations of such a scenario, the group that didn't have to make the decision but was well-informed felt best about it:

1. The parents aren't informed about their child's survival chances, the doctors stop the treatment and the child dies.
2. The parents are told there's a 60% survival chance, but with severe neurological disabilities, before the doctors stop the treatment and the child dies.
3. The parents are told the chances and have to decide themselves.

Groups 1 and 3 felt equally as bad, either for being robbed the choice and the information or for having to deal with both, while group 2 felt glad to know what was going on and that the choice was inevitable.

4 SIMPLE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR POWERFUL CHOICES

Choose to face your fears. Choose to embody your vision. Choose to teach. Choose to open your heart. Choose to serve. Keep choosing and you will see that those choices carve the pathway of your Life. Your choices have creative power. Choose to make the small – sometimes uncomfortable and even painful – steps towards the evolving you, the one that lives within you wanting to be free. In time, aided by your choices, your vision will come into being.

HERE ARE 4 SIMPLE QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GUIDE YOUR POWERFUL CHOICES:

1. Does this opportunity move me closer to my vision?
2. Does this increase my energy, joy, and creativity exponentially?
3. Does this opportunity connect me with those I serve best?
4. If my time was worth \$10,000 per day, would I still do this?

Every day you make choices. Everything you say and do is the result of a choice you made, consciously or unconsciously. For every choice, big or small, there's no certainty that you'll attain your desired outcome. It's an adventure! Nothing is certain in this world but change. That you can count on. Feel the lightness of the ever-evolving you. All of Life is in movement, and you are a child of this infinite universe.

QUESTIONS

1. How good you are at deciding about anything in your daily life and how, when it comes to big decisions (partner change, job change, moving into a new house, starting a business). What was your big choice and how did you decide, why?
2. What is your motivation to do a choice, change something?
3. If you could have someone, who would decide everything for you, would you accept it?
4. Would you rather be smart or beautiful / handsome? Why would you choose so? What; easier to live with?
5. If you had to lose one of your senses (sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste) which would you rather lose? Why? What's most important to you?
6. What's the most out-of-character (not fitting your personality, as you're known to people) choice you've ever made? Why did you do it?
7. What's the worst piece of advice you've ever been given when you've been trying to choose between two things?
8. What's your most urgent priority for the rest of the year?
9. If someone could help you to choose between two hard choices, who would you pick, why?
10. If you had just 24 hours to live, what would you want to do with your time?