

When having options is not always best

Freedom is something that people fight and die for. Having the power to choose how one lives his won life is a sacred right that all free men enjoy. People choose what they want for their lives from their careers, to their names, nationality and even right down to the color of their hair. It is only logical to think that if some choice is good, more is better; people who care about having infinite options will benefit from them (Schwartz, 2004). When there is a wide range of objects to choose from, then chances are people will get the item that best suits their needs.

But Barry Schwartz in his article *The Tyranny of Choice* argues that sometimes although having some is better than none, more is not always better than less. What exactly does this mean? Simply put, he argues that sometimes having more options is not always beneficial to man. In his article, Schwartz stated that “it seems that as society grows wealthier and people become freer to do whatever they want, they get less happy”. Though he made this statement, Schwartz also cited that a single factor is not enough to explain the root of a person’s misery but the studies that the group has undertaken showed that there was a significant correlation between the expansion of choices and a person’s unhappiness.

Schwartz and his group conducted a research where they were able to separate the participants into maximizers or people who always aim to make the best possible choice and the satisficers or those who settle for good enough whether or not there’s a better choice out there. Most of their conclusions were based on the behaviors of these sets of people. Having more options presents a problem for maximizers. Because maximizers want to get the best option, they labor over every decision that they have to make. If they have more alternatives, their choosing becomes such a hard task for them. But the problem does not stop here. Schwartz goes on to

explain that after making the selection, the maximizers also tend to agonize over the what ifs. What if the other selection was better? What if they made the wrong decision? These thoughts take away the satisfaction that the maximizers get from the item that they have chosen. An even worse scenario is when the maximizers are disappointed with their choice and later on regrets purchasing the item. This takes away not only their satisfaction but also their sense of well-being.

Schwartz explains that opportunity costs play a major role why having more selection is not always best. One of the costs of making a selection is losing the opportunities that a different option would have afforded (Schwartz, 2004). When there are more options, then it creates a deeper sense of loss and less satisfaction is derived from the item that was chosen. The studies that the group conducted also showed that the bad or negative feelings last longer than good or positive feelings. When a person is satisfied with what one has purchased, the good feeling brought about by gaining such a precious item does not last long. Meanwhile, when a person is disappointed with one's selection, the bad feeling of incurring such a loss lasts longer. It stays, it lingers. Losses make us hurt more than gains make us feel good (Schwartz, 2004). Maximizers tend to labor too much on their selection so they are cognizant of the opportunity losses that they incur when they make a selection. Satisficers, on the other hand, employ their good enough standards which mean that they search less for alternatives and are therefore not too aware of lost opportunities.

Another factor that contributes to man's misery because of choice is regrets. Schwartz cited that they found that "people with high sensitivity to regret are less happy, less satisfied with life, less optimistic and more depressed than those with less sensitivity". The study also showed

that people more prone to regrets are maximizers. Regret always comes after a decision has been made. Therefore when one is offered a great deal of selection, one tries hard to make the best possible decision. But it is not always possible to make the best selection. This is where regret comes in. Maximizers regret their decisions when they realize that something is better than what they have chosen. They regret the fact that a loss has been incurred because of the wrong choice.

Schwartz reported that there are two factors affecting regret; how much one feels personal responsibility for the result and how easy it is to imagine a better alternative. Having choices only elevates the possibility of a person feeling these two factors. When there is no other alternative, then the person did not really choose because the decision has been made for him. This leaves no room for regrets since the person had no choice. Having alternatives only frustrates the person because the blame of not making the right decision is placed on him.

Having many choices also allows man to adapt to things. Having selection makes man get used to the way things are therefore making it hard for him to be satisfied because he will always want more. Positive experiences derived from a decision do not sustain themselves. The person's expectations will go higher and higher until nothing will ever satisfy the person anymore.

When a person is never satisfied and all of his decisions seemed like mistakes, then it will be considered a personal failure. The person blames himself for every loss, every disappointment. If the experience of disappointment is relentless, if virtually every choice you make fails to live up to expectations and aspirations, and if you consistently take personal responsibility for disappointments, then the conclusions that you cannot do anything right

becomes devastating (Schwartz, 2004). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so many American are depressed today.

Schwartz cited many examples when having many choices present a problem to a person. A simple example cited in the articles is that for people who go vacationing to a beach in Cape Cod could still be thinking of the loss of not being able to dine in the fabulous restaurants in Napa Valley. Because of this, they might not be able to appreciate the beauty of the beach because they are busy thinking about another place.

Another example that is cited is the article is very common among women. Schwartz cited the example of buying a pair of expensive shoes that was discovered to be so uncomfortable that they keep the owner from being able to walk properly when they are worn. Chances are the buyer will not toss them out and will hold on to them even if the person cannot wear them anymore. The shoes then become a constant reminder of the wrong decision made by the buyer.

Buying clothes has become harder also. Pants, for example, should be fairly easy to buy. But since there are many cut styles, colors, textures, cloths and lengths to choose from, buying pants has become a life changing even that needs careful consideration. The many brands to choose from do not help either. I need to buy new denim jeans but as of today, I still have not found the right pair. I have tried on many pants and liked a few, but I still can not make a decision. The fear of buying the wrong pair, a pair that will shrink when washed or will not fit after dinner cripples me. So for now, I remain pantless. Perhaps, if there were fewer brands and selection to choose from, I could have gotten those weeks ago. But this is the price we have to pay for our freedom to choose.