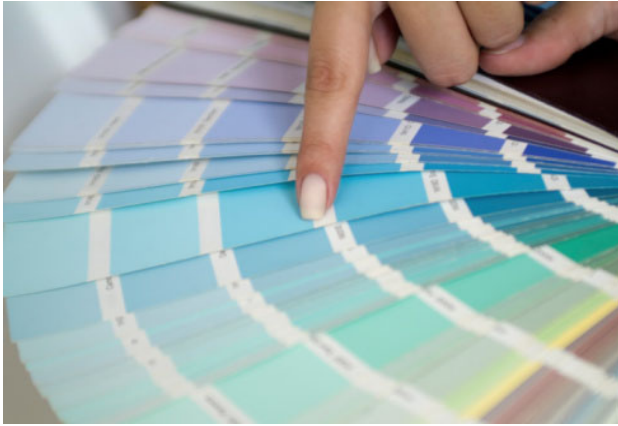# Can We Have too Many Choices?

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Research found that thinking about choice reduces people's support for the public good and their empathy

Whether we're deciding what to eat for lunch at the cafeteria, which store to go into at a shopping mall, or what Netflix movie to order, we are constantly surrounded by choices. That sounds like a great thing, but a study published in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science* found that thinking about choice has some negative effects. People show reduced support for the public good and are less sympathetic to others.

One experiment found that volunteers who were primed to think about choice were less likely to support policies promoting greater equality and benefits for society than volunteers who did not think about choice. In a second experiment, volunteers who thought about choice were more likely to blame victims for bringing negative events on themselves (e.g. having a heart attack or losing a job).

To test whether this pattern happened cross-culturally, researchers conducted another experiment in India. They found that while empathy towards disadvantaged individuals decreased for American students who were primed to think about choice, it didn't for Indian students.

In the U.S., we cherish our freedom of choice, but all the consumer choices available to us may have negative effects on our empathy and concern for the collective good.