

The Choice Mindset: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior

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Researchers across the social and decision sciences assume whenever people can pick one of multiple options, they have a choice. I propose that even when faced with multiple options, people sometimes perceive that they are making a choice, but other times fail to realize that they are making a choice. Nudging people to construe the act of selecting one of many options as a choice can have a broad range of effects on their subsequent judgment and decision making. In public goods game, people thinking in terms of choices contribute less to public goods and are less likely to punish free riders. In experimental markets, people thinking in terms of choices are less concerned about the welfare of third parties who are affected by their choices (e.g., people who are bearing the brunt of environmental pollution or other externalities). On the positive side, people thinking in terms of choices are less susceptible to decision making errors, such as the anchoring bias and excessive perseverance. A field experiment found that a chronic choice mindset can improve people's everyday decision making: students' time allocation decisions suffered as they approached the end of the semester, but a five week choice mindset intervention arrested this decline, helping students allocate their time in a more optimal manner. Thus, thinking of terms of choices can have a wide range of consequences for the quality of people's judgment and decision making.