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Drawing out the Satisficer from the Maximizer

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Abstract

How a full glass is sketched by a person is used as an identification of a maximizer/satisficer-type personality. There is evidence that students who interpret the “full glass” description as, in fact, a glass that is filled up to the brim is the maximizer-types and those who draw their glass just filled below the brim as the satisficer-types. Analysis of self-reported subjective well-being indicates that the satisficer-types enjoy higher school domain satisfaction than the maximizer-types.

Keywords

Drawing, maximizer, satisficer, subjective well-being, satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The maximizing person seeks to find the very best while the satisficing person accepts what is good enough (Schwartz et al. 2002; Iyengar et al 2006; Parker et al. 2007; Diab et al. 2008; Polman 2010; Jain et al. 2012). Relative to the satisficers, the maximizers are easily disappointed with their own outcomes or decisions, which are often manifested as self-reports of lower levels of happiness, satisfaction, or optimism.

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Here, a drawing exercise analogous to that in Tuckey (1992) and Matthews (1996) is used to “draw out” the satisficer from the maximizer from a group of students. This indirect method of matching the drawing itself to the maximizer or satisficer predisposition is based on the theory that the obtained material reflects or projects the underlying personality or, at the least, an aspect of the personality (Sundberg 1977). Few problems or complications can be expected from the person to follow the drawing instruction if the exercise is designed in a straightforward manner. The exercise itself can be made easy enough to perform so there is no hesitation with regard to drawing skills or insecurity with regard to a judgment on the quality of the drawing. Thus, the act of drawing under such circumstances can bypass the conscious defenses in the person and taps into the inner self to reveal an aspect of personality that is relevant for analysis. For the present study, participants were asked to draw their interpretation of a “full glass” that corresponds to a marker on “10” or “100%” on a scale from 0 to 10. The hypothesis is as follows: drawing a glass that is filled to the brim indicates a maximizer-type personality, while drawing a glass that is filled below the brim indicates a satisficer-type personality.

2. METHOD

Participants

Participants were sophomore students taking the required course in basic economics at a private university. None of the participants declared economics as a major. Participation in the study was voluntary. No extra credit was offered to the students.

Of the 421 students who answered the questionnaire, 64 did not answer or did not give a valid answer to a scale-identification question (see below). Useful data are from 357 students (approx. 18% of the total sophomore population in private university), comprising of 184 males (mean =

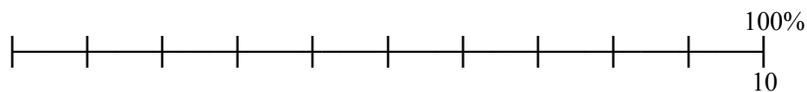
18.8, SD = 1.0, range = 17-22 years) and 173 females (mean = 18.4 years, SD = 0.8, range = 17-20 years).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered at the start of the class. Students were not informed in the previous lecture days about the planned study in order to remove anticipation and other similar processes that might influence their responses.

The questionnaire had two parts. After completing Part 1, the students had to go to the front table or to the back table in the classroom to hand to the proctor their completed questionnaire and to get Part 2. Aside from the demographic queries, Part 1 contained a scale identification question that asked the students to provide the omitted information on the diagram itself.

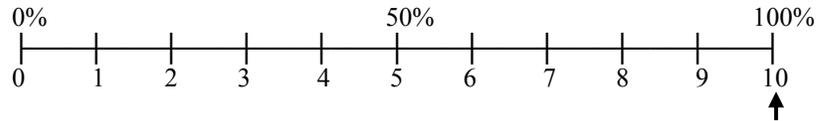
What do you think might be the values on each of the increments on the left of the values “10” and “100%” on the scale? Write the values on the scale itself.



“Value” rather than a more explicit expression like “numerical value” was used as a preliminary exercise for Part 2. Subsequently, students answered a query phrased as a life domain satisfaction.

Consider the scale you marked [above]. Consider also your overall experience as a student in [name of] University so far. Where on the scale [above...] might you locate your overall experience as a student [...] so far? Write your answer on the scale itself.

Part 2 of the questionnaire started with the following diagram:

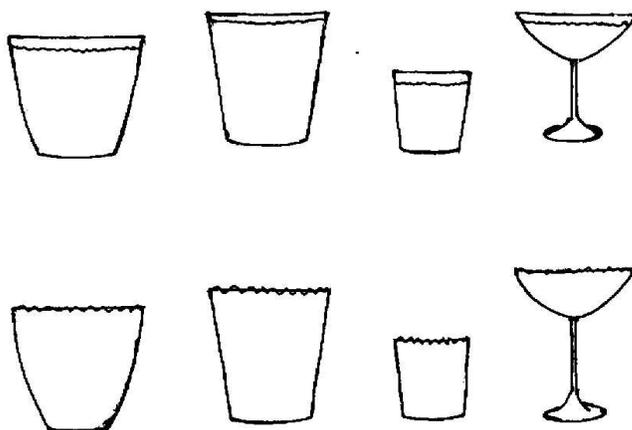


Then, students were asked to draw with the following instructions:

Draw a glass filled with water that, you think, might illustrate the situation indicated by the arrow on the scale [above]. Draw in the space provided.

The labels “5” and “50%” on the scale serve as reference for a 50% full glass (or, 50% empty). Obviously, “0” or “0%” means an empty glass, while “10” or “10%” means a full glass. In effect, the mid-point labels produces a cognitive process such that a 50% empty glass is 50% empty regardless of the size of the glass, the location of the glass, the time of day when the person looked at the glass, etc. and, thus, the “full glass” ought to be double the 50%. Some drawings of the participants are produced in Figure 1 with the so-called satisficer-type drawings shown on the top row and the so-called maximizer-type drawings shown on the bottom row.

Figure 1



Note: The sketches are reproductions of students' drawings.

RESULTS

Gender is not correlated with the drawing of the maximizer (i.e., glass filled up to the brim) and that of satisficer (i.e., glass filled below the brim), $r = -0.02$, $p = ns$. The same conclusion for age, $r = -0.04$, $p = ns$. Moreover, gender ($r = 0.03$, $p = ns$; $t(1) = 0.502$, $p = n.s.$) and age ($r = 00$, $p = ns$; $t(6) = 0.987$, $p = n.s.$) are also not correlated with school domain satisfaction. What appears strongly from the analysis is that, relative to the maximizer-type, the purported drawing of a satisficer-type is positively correlated with school domain satisfaction, $r = 0.13$, $p < 0.014$. In fact, school domain satisfaction varies between the satisficer-type ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 1.298$) and the maximizer-type ($M = 6.98$, $SD = 1.515$), albeit a larger sample size might be desirable for an even more robust conclusion, $t(1) = 2.471$, $p < 0.014$, $d = 0.2985$. Regression confirms the initial findings ($\beta_{\text{satisficer}} = 0.443$, $p < 0.01$), albeit the age, gender, and drawing together explain little of the total variation in school domain satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.02$, $F(3, 355) = 2.518$, $p < 0.058$). Still, it can be argued that the evidence here confirms the findings in the extant literature.

CONCLUSION

Drawing was a useful technique for the identification of the maximizer-type and satisficer-type personalities and analysis self-reported subjective well-being. Of course, there are issues with the drawing exercise itself because rarely in real life do people actually fill glasses up to the very top yet they still count as full. Still, the fact that some students drew their full glasses as filled up to the brim despite the social norm or practice of not filling up to the brim suggests that the drawing indicate something beyond an idiosyncratic response to the drawing instruction but more about an underlying predisposition or projection of an aspect of the personality. Thus, the students who interpreted the “full glass” description as a glass that is filled up to the brim was identified as the maximizer-types and those who drew their glass just filled below the brim as the satisficer-types.

Interestingly, this identification was also found to correlate with the student's self-reported school domain satisfaction.

Notwithstanding the preliminary nature of this study, there are practical applications to knowing who might be a maximizer or satisficer. From Kasser and Ryan (1996) along with Oishi et al. (2007) and Grant and Schwartz (2011), it may be argued that some life domains may call for the satisficing-type because they emphasize the so-called "extrinsic goals" like grades, money, and social status. In other life domains, however, the maximizing-type personality is more important because they stress the so-called "intrinsic goals" like relationships and other-regarding behavior. Thus, at the level of the individual in general, the fact that maximizing behavior is not necessarily a good course of action suggests that satisficing behavior can turn out to be the better strategy. In the context of students and the university, there is perhaps a need to rethink what the school philosophy of excellence means and how it can be achieved without compromising the well-being of students. Finally, in the broader context of the society, the maximizer/satisficer duality poses a serious challenge to a rethinking of public policy. In particular, how can democratic participation towards raising social welfare be sensible or even sustainable when the default position, if not the taught position, is to maximize?

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