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# Are maximizers unhappier than satisficers? A comparison between Japan and the USA <sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The present research examined whether maximizing tendencies are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being among Japanese and American residents. Two popular scales exist to measure maximizing tendencies: a Schwartz et al. (2002) scale that conceptualizes maximizing as a combination of high standards and a strong desire to optimize choice and a Diab, Gillespie, and Highhouse (2008) scale which primarily emphasizes the high standards component of maximizing tendencies. Among Americans, maximizers reported being more depressed, less happy, and less satisfied with their lives when assessed by Schwartz et al.'s (2002) scale. In contrast, when assessed by Diab et al.'s (2008) scale, American maximizers actually reported being happier than satisficers. Among Japanese, however, maximizers reported being more depressed, less happy, and less satisfied with their lives regardless of the scale used.

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## 1. Introduction

In economics, people are believed to behave in a rational way, or to maximize their utility (Persky, 1995). Questioning this rationality assumption, Simon (1955) proposed the idea of bounded rationality, namely, that people are rational and look to maximize utility to a certain extent (limited by available information, the actor's motivation and abilities). He argued that instead of always aiming for the best possible option, people set a certain "good enough" standard, and when the standard is met, people reach their decision. Simon called this "satisficing." In psychological science, Schwartz et al. (2002) for the first time conceptualized and assessed maximizing tendencies as individual differences. They found that maximizers were less happy and more depressed than satisficers. Iyengar, Wells, and Schwartz (2006) further discovered that graduating college seniors with maximizing tendencies found higher paying jobs than seniors with satisficing tendencies, yet maximizers were less satisfied with their jobs than satisficers (see also Bruine de Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007; Parker, Bruine de Bruin, & Fischhoff, 2007 for unfavorable decision outcomes for

maximizers relative to satisficers). Based on these findings, at first, it appeared that maximizing is undesirable for subjective well-being (here operationalized by life satisfaction and happiness, and relative lack of depression).

Recently, however, several studies have shown that the inverse association between maximizing and subjective well-being was not as robust as originally believed. Diab, Gillespie, and Highhouse (2008), for instance, created an alternative maximizing scale, and showed that maximizing is not negatively associated with subjective well-being when measured by the new maximizing tendency scale. This is in part because Diab et al.'s scale focuses only on the maximizer's high standards (e.g., "I don't like having to settle for 'good enough'.") rather than the neurotic aspects of maximizing (e.g., "When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options even while attempting to watch one program."). In addition to creating a new maximizing scale (Diab et al., 2008), several researchers have modified the original Schwartz et al. scale to improve its psychometric properties (see Lai, 2010; Nenkov, Morrin, Ward, Schwartz, & Hulland, 2008; Rim, Turner, Betz, & Nygren, 2011; Weinhardt, Morse, Chimeli, & Fisher, 2012).

Purvis, Howell, and Iyer (2011) have also shown that maximizing tendencies measured by Schwartz et al.'s (2002) original scale were correlated with neuroticism, and that once neuroticism was statistically controlled for, the inverse correlation between maximizing and subjective well-being disappeared. Also, among the three subscales, only "alternative search" (e.g., "When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options

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