likely end up without a degree in either field at the end of his four years at MIT, and he would require another year (paid for by his parents) to complete his degree. (He eventually graduated with a degree in computer science, but he found the perfect blend in his first job—designing nuclear subs for the Navy.)

Dana, another student of mine, had a similar problem—but hers centered on two boyfriends. She could dedicate her energy and passion to a person she had met recently and, she hoped, build an enduring relationship with him. Or she could continue to put time and effort into a previous relationship that was dying. She clearly liked the new boyfriend better than the former one—yet she couldn't let the earlier relationship go. Meanwhile, her new boyfriend was getting restless. "Do you really want to risk losing the boy you love," I asked her, "for the remote possibility that you may discover—at some later date—that you love your former boyfriend more?" She shook her head "no," and broke into tears.*

What is it about options that is so difficult for us? Why do we feel compelled to keep as many doors open as possible, even at great expense? Why can't we simply commit ourselves?†

To try to answer these questions, Jiwoong Shin (a professor at Yale) and I devised a series of experiments that we hoped would capture the dilemma represented by Joe and Dana. In our case, the experiment would be based on a com-

*I'm often surprised by how much people confide in me. I think it's partly due to my scars, and to the obvious fact that I've been through substantial trauma. On the other hand, what I would like to believe is that people simply recognize my unique insight into the human psyche, and thus seek my advice. Either way, I learn a lot from the stories people share with me.

†Matrimony is a social device that would seem to force individuals to shut down their alternative options, but, as we know, it too doesn't always work.