

Gone but Not Forgotten: Identifying the Goals, Strategies, and Behaviors of Maximizers

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Introduction

Conceptual Issues:

- Maximizing was originally defined as the tendency to evaluate all options closely and select the *best* one (Schwartz et al., 2002)
- Three components of maximizing have been identified: high standards (HS), alternative search (AS), and decision difficulty (DD; Nenkov et al., 2008)
- However, researchers have not agreed on which of these components best conceptualize what maximizing really is (e.g., Diab, Gillespie, & Highhouse, 2008; Rim et al., 2011)
- We propose that these “components” are best conceptualized as the following:

High Standards	Goal	What maximizers <i>want</i>
Alternative Search	Strategy	What maximizers <i>do</i>
Decision Difficulty	Experiential outcome	What maximizers <i>experience</i>

Antecedent Motivational Factors:

- We also propose two motivational orientations will predict motivational profiles that delineate adaptive or maladaptive forms of maximization: promotion focus (Higgins, 1997) and assessment mode (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003)

Promotion focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Concerned with advancement goals, sensitive to gains/non-gainsPreference for eager, approach-oriented strategies to achieve goals
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Concerned with evaluating and comparing entitiesPreference for taking time to do the “right” thing

- Promotion focus’ concern with gains and advancement suggests association with high standards; however, emphasis on eager strategies should lead to low alternative search and decision difficulty
- Assessment’s concern with evaluation and comparison seems very close to the original conceptualization of maximizing, with high standards and evaluation of alternatives leading to difficulty with decision-making

Study 2

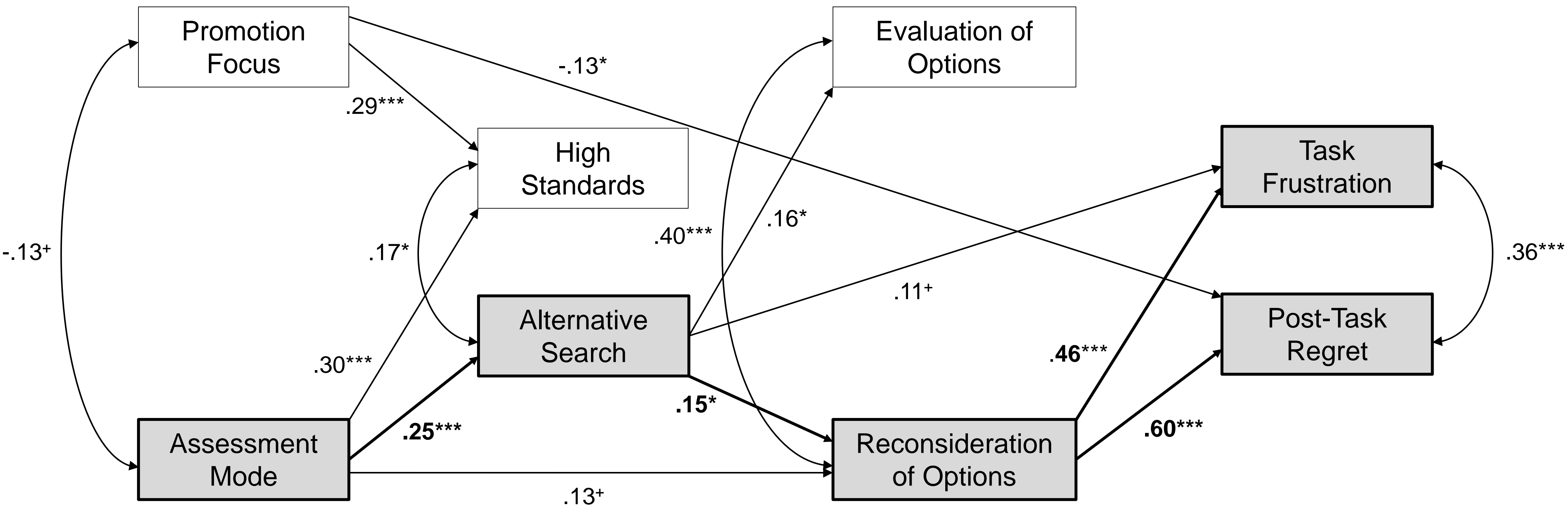


Figure 1. Final structural equation model, displaying standardized estimates (Study 2).

Study 1

Participants:

- 336 participants from Mechanical Turk (44% women)
- Age: $M = 33.70$, $SD = 12.09$

Method:

- Participants completed three scales:
 - Regulatory Focus Questionnaire ($\alpha = .74$; Higgins et al., 2001)
 - Regulatory Mode Questionnaire ($\alpha = .81$; Kruglanski et al., 2000)
 - Maximization Scale (MS; $\alpha = .66$; Schwartz et al., 2002)

Results:

Table 1. Regression coefficients of motivational processes predicting maximizing components

(β)	HS	AS	DD
Promotion	.38***	-.07*	-.37***
Assessment	.26***	.33***	.16***

- Promotion and assessment both show indications of having high standards; however, only people high in assessment seem to experience negative effects (DD) from their maximizing tendencies

Study 2

Participants:

- 210 online participants from University of Waterloo (68% women)
- Age: $M = 20.29$, $SD = 3.84$

Method:

- Participants completed same scales as in Study 1
- Engaged in product choice task, selecting one car they wished to purchase from a table displaying several characteristics of each car
- Afterward, were asked what strategies they used: extent to which they examined options ($\alpha = .67$), extent to which they reconsidered options after eliminating them ($\alpha = .74$)
- Were also asked how much regret ($\alpha = .81$) and frustration they experienced as a result of the decision

Results:

- Created structural equation model to test overall model
- Started with fully saturated model, then trimmed non-significant pathways
- Overall model fit was very good: $\chi^2(14, N = 196) = 12.52$, $p = .57$
- Relative fit statistics: CFI = 1.00; RMSEA < .001, 90% CI [.000, .063], $p_{\text{close-fit}} = .88$
- Final model shown in Figure 1 above

Conclusions

- Promotion focus and assessment mode were both positively associated with high standards, but only assessment positively predicted alternative search and decision difficulty
- Assessment mode predicted higher frustration and regret on the choice task, mediated by alternative search
- Thus, alternative search seems to be a particularly maladaptive strategy for decision-making
- While alternative search predicted both behaviours, it was the reconsideration of options in particular that predicted frustration and regret, while simply evaluating more options did not

Implications

- This research speaks to the importance of examining motivational antecedents of maximization, to explain why some individuals maximize and others do not
- This also helps to resolve the conceptual issues surrounding maximization as a construct; if different motivational profiles reveal adaptive and maladaptive forms of maximization, it may clarify how these “components” of maximizing fit together
- Conceptualizing alternative search as one of many possible strategy maximizers may use opens the door for further research on identifying other strategies, some of which may be more adaptive than others

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