



Toward a Taxonomy of Decisions: Importance, Difficulty, and Beyond

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Introduction

- Much of what we know about decision-making has examined decisions made in very specific contexts.
- However, less research has been done regarding the variety of decisions people make outside of the laboratory.
- How do people characterize their “everyday” decisions?

Research Goals

- **What dimensions do decisions differ on?**
- **Using these dimensions, are there different profiles associated with certain kinds of decisions?**
- **Can these profiles be used to improve decision-making?**

Study 1

Method

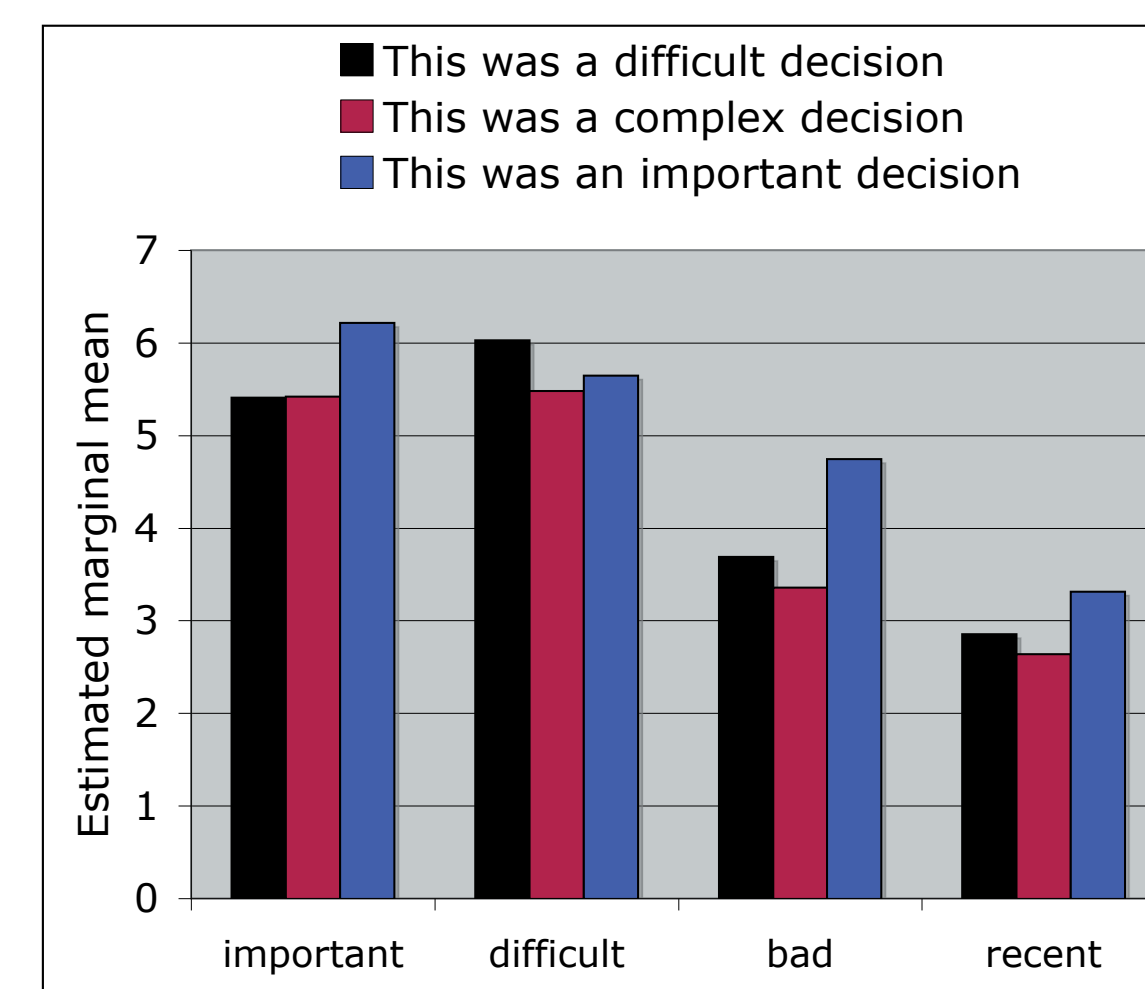
- 211 participants completed a web survey.
- Participants described and characterized 4 different decisions:
 - The last IMPORTANT decision they made
 - The last DIFFICULT decision they made
 - The last BAD decision they made
 - The most RECENT decision they made

Dimensions Measured

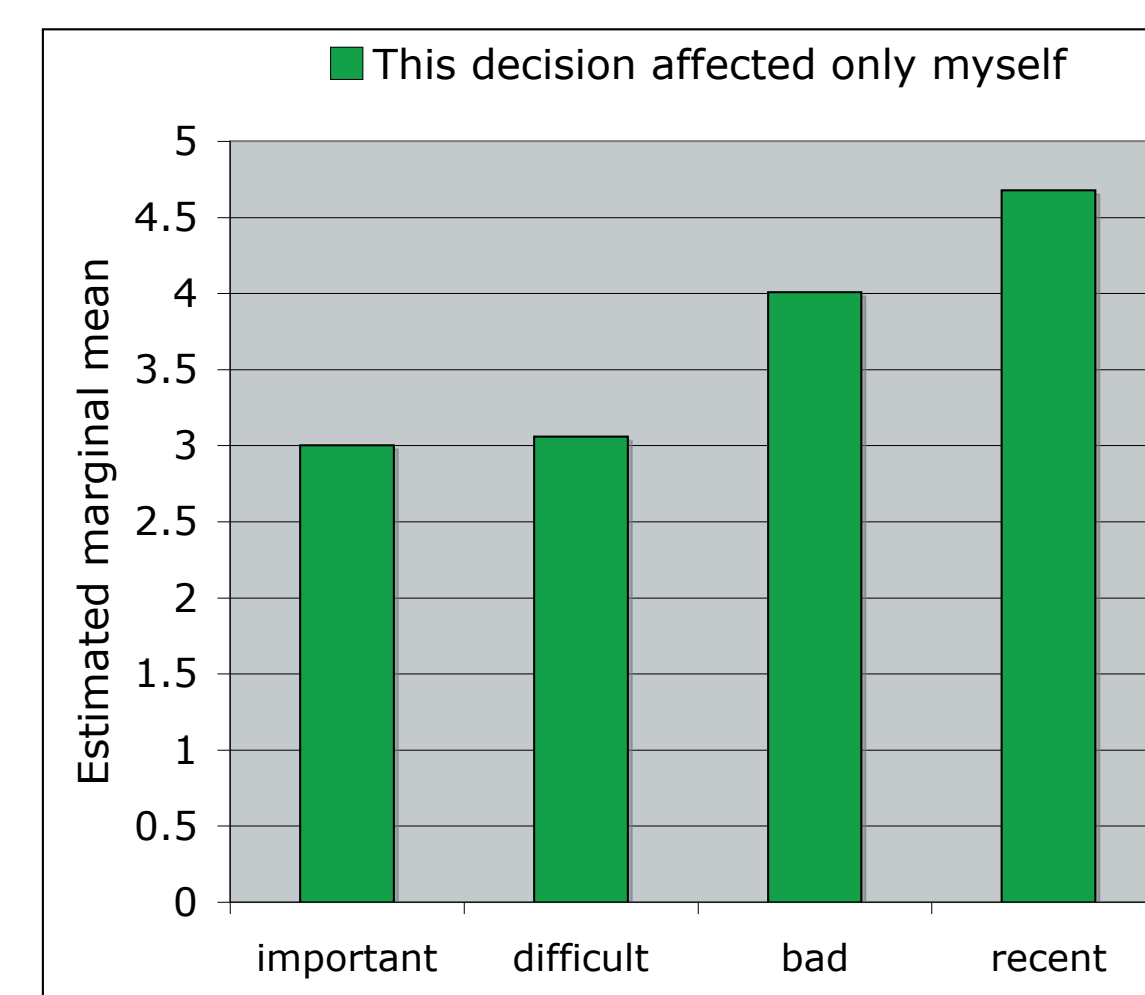
- All participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements on 7-point Likert scales.
- Example: “This was an important decision”
 - from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 7 = “Strongly agree”
- 18 Dimensions were measured:

Decision Importance	Decision Difficulty	Decision Complexity
Number of Dimensions	Option Similarity	Option Exclusivity
Pos. Consequences	Evaluability	Perceived Control
Neg. Consequences	Info about Options	Process Evaluation
Involvement of Self	“Right” Choice	Desire to Choose
Involvement of Others	Open-Endedness	Avoidability

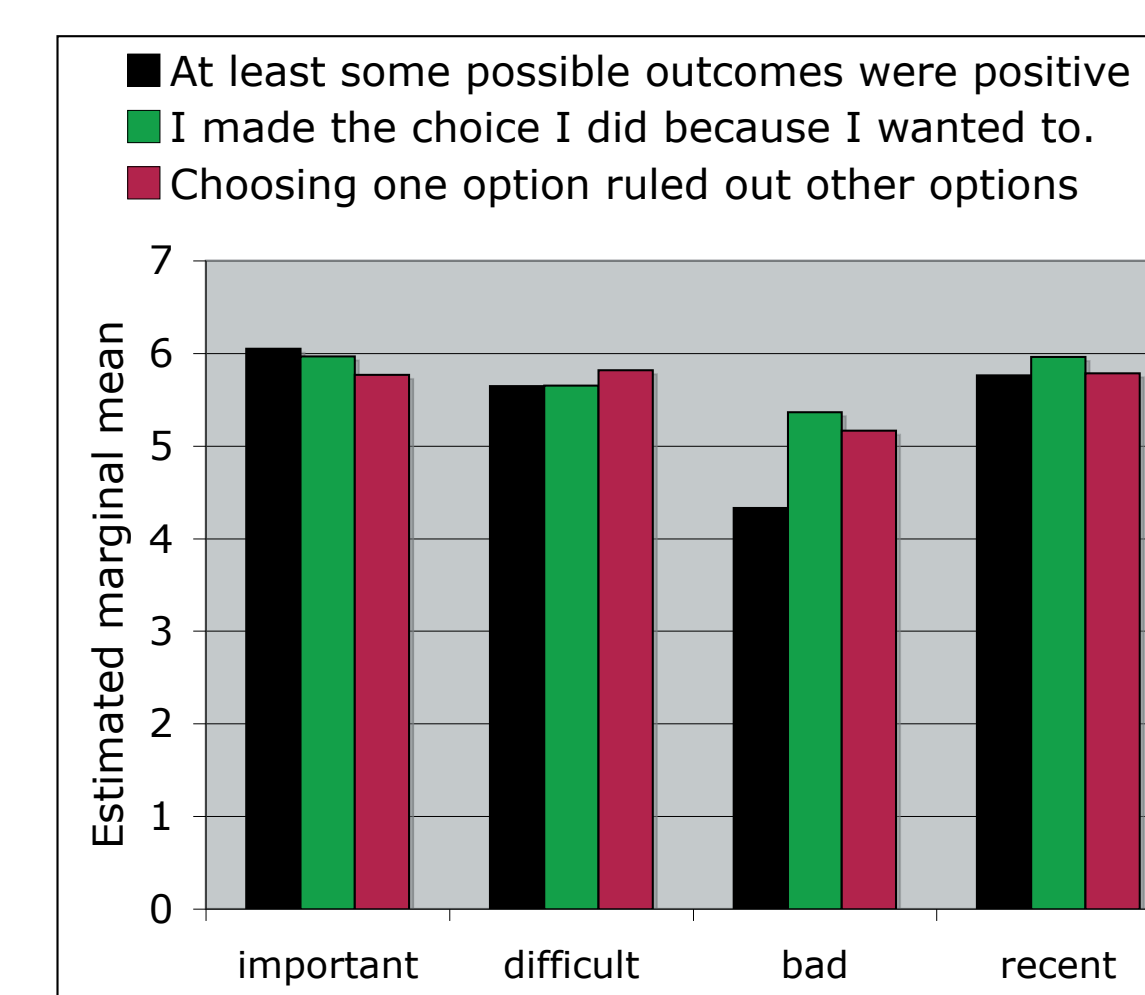
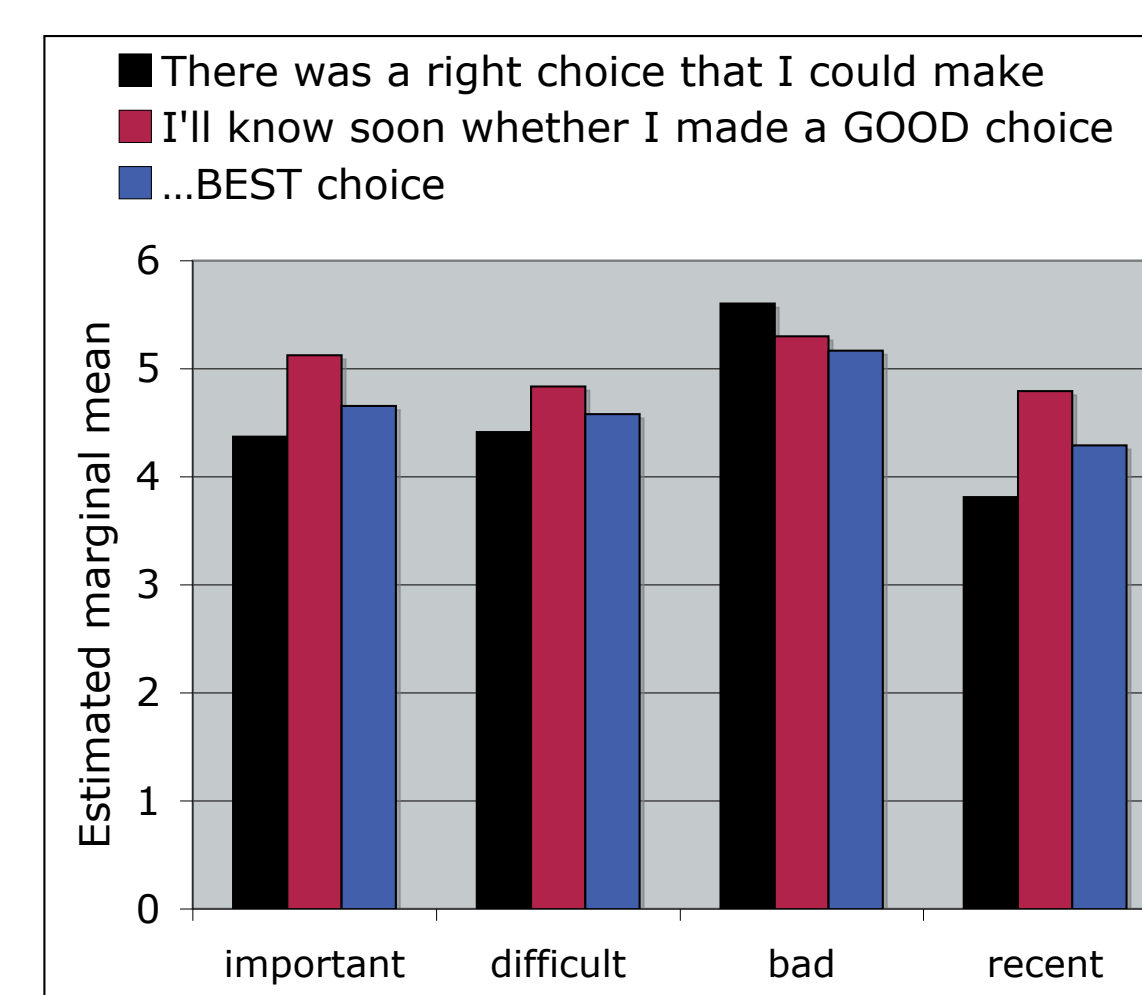
Results



- Important and difficult decisions were rated as more complex, difficult, and important than bad and recent decisions were.
- Bad decisions were rated higher on these dimensions than recent decisions.



- In contrast to important and difficult decisions, bad and recent decisions were more likely to affect only the self.



- Bad decisions were also more likely to be perceived as having a “right choice,” and to be immediately evaluable
- Bad decisions were perceived as less likely to produce positive outcomes, and were rated as being less desirable to make
- Bad decisions were less likely to offer mutually exclusive options

Study 2

Goals

- Uncover the characteristic profile of each of the 4 decision types (Important, Difficult, Bad, Recent)
- Are these profiles unique? How well do they distinguish decision types from each other?

Method

- 276 participants each described 1 of the 4 decisions

Results

- **Study 1’s results were replicated**
- **Bad decisions were differentiable from other decisions:**
 - A MANOVA was run to examine between-decision differences
 - 45.3% variance explained, $F[21,221] = 8.72, p < .001$
 - Discriminant function loadings suggest that happiness (or lack thereof) with the process was most important in discriminating bad decisions from others, $b = -.807$ (standardized coefficient)
 - Other dimensions that distinguished bad decisions included complexity; perception of a “right” choice; and whether equal information was provided for all options (b 's $> .3$)
- **Important and difficult decisions were differentiable from recent decisions:**
 - 48.2% variance explained, $F[21,221] = 9.80, p < .001$
 - Importance ($b = .597$); information equality ($b = .415$); and open-endedness ($b = -.468$) were largest among the distinguishing dimensions
- **Important decisions were not differentiable from difficult**
- **Profiles could be used to classify decisions at greater-than-chance rates:**
 - 66.5% correct classification for all categories
 - 80.8% correct classification with important/difficult collapsed

Conclusions

- **Decisions consistently differ on a number of dimensions.**
- **These dimensions in turn can be used to profile decision types.**
- **Important and difficult decisions are very similar, and are reliably distinguishable from other sorts of decisions.**
- **Future work will consider how everyday decision-making can be improved based upon characteristic profiling.**