

Morganton News Herald – Sunday, Sept. 4, 2016

Generations



## The dilemma of choice

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

It was supposed to be one of those quick DeMarco trips to the grocery store to pick up a few items, but ended up with inner turmoil when I got to the cookie aisle.

My husband isn't usually an Oreo man. In fact, in our 17 years of marriage, I think I've only bought a package of Oreos once before. However, today Oreos were advertised "buy one/ get one free," so I figured maybe the desire of a childhood favorite of mine would entice him.

Parked in front of the Oreo display, which took up about a quarter of the entire aisle of cookies, I realized this was not going to be an easy "grab and go" task.

My eyes started on the top shelf where I found something called "Heads or Tails," a mixture of both chocolate and golden Oreos. That was easy to eliminate since my husband doesn't adjust well to change and a golden Oreo simply wouldn't be an Oreo in his book.

"Double Stuffs" were next, followed by "Triple Stuffs," which I imagine was developed for the Oreo lover that doesn't mind if his or her cookie is too thick to dunk into a glass of milk.

Next were the "Cool Mint Oreos," "Thin Mint Oreos," "Chocolate Filled Oreos," and followed by a series of fudge creams in all sorts of flavors (according to [www.popsugar.com](http://www.popsugar.com), at one time or another creams included peanut butter, fudge with sprinkles, berry burst ice cream with pink filling, and "Spring Oreos" featuring a chocolate cookie with bright yellow frosting).

Three-quarters down the display were the "Reduced Fat Oreos," which would be deemed as sacrilegious if I brought them home for my husband's dunking.

By the time I got to the plain old Oreos that we Baby Boomers loved as kids, which happened to be on the bottom shelf, I suddenly didn't want them anymore

"I was going to buy you Oreos," I said to my husband as I unpacked the groceries.

"Where are they?" he asked holding an empty plastic bag.

"Too many to choose from. Maybe next time."

This made me think about how frustrating it is for all of us to be overwhelmed by an abundance of choices and the fear of making the wrong decision. Whether we're buying a pair of jeans, ordering a cup of coffee (latte, non-latte, cappuccino, heavy foam, no foam, whipped cream), selecting a long-distance carrier, applying to college, choosing a doctor, ordering a pizza, setting up a 401(k), everyday decisions — both big and small — have become increasingly complex due to the overwhelming abundance of choice with which we are presented.

As Americans, we assume that more choice means better options and greater satisfaction. Ah, not so according to some scholars studying the effects of too many choices on the poor unsuspecting buyer. According to studies, choice overload can make you question the decisions you make before you even make them, it can set you up for unrealistically high expectations, and it can make you blame yourself for any and all failures.

Should I have ordered the pizza with half pepperoni and half sausage instead of just plain old pepperoni? Thick crust, deep dish or thin? Square or round? Too much trouble trying to decide, so it's hamburgers tonight.

Yes, the study concluded that for businesses that offer too many choices, we may not buy anything as in my case of Oreo overload.

Remember when the world was simple and stuff only came in one or two choices? Think about the original products you grew up with, minus the fluff and flair, and how happy you were just to have them. Are there enough of us out there that don't care about a company "introducing its new and improved product" because the original has been around since the 19th century and there was nothing wrong with it in the first place?

Is there some of us that really don't care if a phone can keep us communicated with the outside world every second of the day and do it faster than the speed of light?

I'd love to see an aisle in a grocery store that says simply, "Default Option Aisle," which would give shoppers only two or three maximum choices to choose from on all its items from toothpaste to paper towels.

Even better, put that aisle next to another that features "Easy Open Containers – We're Not Kidding," and I can almost guarantee success.

At least, I'll shop there.

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