

“The Art of Subtraction”

“We investigate how making highly consequential, highly undesirable decisions affects emotions and preference for autonomy. We examine individuals facing real or hypothetical decisions to discontinue their infants’ life support who either choose personally or have physicians choose for them. Findings from a multi-disciplinary approach consisting of a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and three laboratory studies reveal that perceived personal causality for making tragic decisions generates more negative feelings than having the same choices externally made. Tragic decisions also undermine coping abilities, weakening the desire for autonomy. Consequently, participants disliked making decisions but also resented relinquishing their option to choose.”