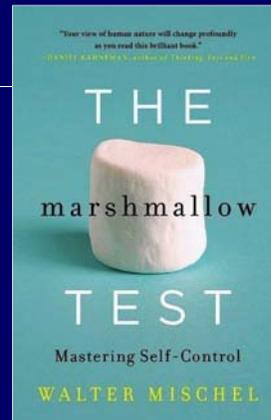


Smart but Stuck: Emotions & Motivation in ADHD

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Preschoolers to Adults: ability to exercise self-control is often consistent

Those able to delay gratification
when in preschool, when 25-30 years
old had:

- ◆ Higher scores on SAT
- ◆ More schooling completed
- ◆ Maintained close relationships better
- ◆ Less use of risky drugs
- ◆ Lower body mass index scores

Professor Mischel claims:

- ◆ Ability to delay gratification now for more advantages later is **not an inborn trait**, but a skill that can be learned
- ◆ “Self-control skills...can be learned, enhanced and harnessed so they become automatically activated when you need them.”

Yet Prof Mischel recognizes that:

- ◆ Ability to delay gratification **depends upon executive functions** of the brain
- ◆ “EF gives us the **freedom to inhibit and cool impulsive urges**, and to think and deploy attention flexibly...to reach our goals.”

Prof Mischel also recognizes that:

- ◆ In adulthood **brain images** of those who were more able to resist temptation as preschoolers **were different** than those less able to delay
- ◆ “If EF does not develop well...those children are at **increased risk for ADHD**”

Context Matters!

Where we are and who we're with shapes which of our emotions are most intense in the moment:

A clinical example:

"Would you like a cookie?"

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Emotions May Shift as Context Shifts

- ◆ A student who works hard to get every term paper in on time may suddenly not care about a paper because his girlfriend broke up with him and is dating someone else.
- ◆ A student whose interest in completing papers is generally lukewarm may suddenly intensify interest and work hard on paper so he can maintain eligibility to stay on his team.

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Motivational Output

- ◆ The rapid-fire calculus of the amygdala and related networks sorts competing priorities emergent from the individual's learning history to mobilize, shape or defer action.
- ◆ Output from the amygdala reaching multiple brain regions quickly alters functional connectivity that activates (or doesn't) both body and brain.

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How and why do those with ADHD have more problems with motivation?

Children & adults with ADHD experience similar emotions to others of similar age

Yet they have more difficulty in:

- ◆ recognizing,
- ◆ responding to,
- ◆ and managing their emotions

This causes impairments in motivation.

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Sue

14 year-old high school student

"Until I got into middle school I always got good grades and never got into trouble. Now everybody thinks I'm hopeless because I dress Goth and don't do much homework. My parents and teachers look down on me just because of the friends I hang out with. They don't really know me or my friends!"

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Sue

- ◆ Reciprocal confrontations
- ◆ Documenting abilities
- ◆ Validating for accommodations
- ◆ Frustrations, hope and reassurance
- ◆ Risks of micro-managing

Eric

20 year-old university student

“I’m in a great university where I want to do well, but I just can’t get myself motivated to do the work. I did really well in high school; now my grades have tanked. I’ve been spending too much time hanging out with my girlfriend and smoking weed. I’ve tried some ADHD meds, but they make me too jittery.”

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Eric

- ◆ Loss of structure
- ◆ Powerful fear of being alone
- ◆ “Does she really want me?”
- ◆ Weed: abstinence vs harm-reduction
- ◆ Immediate vs Delayed Rewards

Mike

21 year-old university student

“My Dad always said I’m smart, but just lazy; maybe he’s right. I got put on academic probation, now I have to drop out. I’m always spacing out and can’t get started on anything until the last minute. I tried my friend’s ADHD med; it helped a lot, but my dad doesn’t want me evaluated for ADHD; he says meds are like steroids.”

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Mike

- ◆ Social anxiety
- ◆ Family skepticism
- ◆ Possible Selves
- ◆ Hidden concerns
- ◆ Sexuality
- ◆ Unacknowledged burdens

James

20 year-old college student

“If I don’t finish four papers this month, I’m going to be put on probation at school. I just can’t get myself to finish. I’ve had this problem a long time, now it’s worse than ever. I’ve done the research for most of my papers, but I can’t get past the 1st paragraph in any one of them. I’m stuck!”

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James

- ◆ Reassurance and denial
- ◆ Writing papers and EF
- ◆ Immobilization by perfectionism
- ◆ Functions of Internet gaming addiction
- ◆ Becoming a licensed driver

Problems with Emotions in ADHD: brakes & ignition

- ◆ Much discussion about problems of emotion in ADHD focuses solely on **putting the brakes on** excessive expression of anger/frustration

(Barkley & Fischer, 2010; Spencer, Faraone, Surman, et. al., 2011; Shaw, Stringaris, Nigg & Leibenluft, 2014)

- ◆ But many with ADHD have greater difficulty with ignition—**getting started** on doing things they need to do, keeping other relevant goals in mind (Brown, 2013)

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How ADHD can affect emotions:

Reactions to small frustrations or transient wishes can gobble up all the space in your mind—like a computer virus

- frustration/anger
 - hurt feelings
 - “got to have it now”
 - “what if?”
- Emotional flooding: too much of one emotion

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Flooding with one emotion

- ◆ While flooded with one emotion, persons with ADHD **tend to forget about other relevant facts or emotions**

-may forget their love & wish to protect the person—friend, parent, child, co-worker—who frustrated or angered them and say or do things that are **too hurtful**

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Too Little Emotion

Some with ADHD report that they have too little emotion for tasks that are actually important to them; **they can't get started!**

Usually this involves getting **stuck in the concerns of the moment** and not responding to the bigger picture, the longer term.

Examples of Too Little Emotion for the Bigger Picture

- ◆ Tired when waking up, snooze alarm repeats while forgetting recent warning from boss
- ◆ Impulsive purchase using funds needed for an important upcoming expense

ADHD “Hyperfocus” can bias and impair motivation

Focused **too intensely** on one goal or task, you may forget other goals you have or how actions of the moment may affect your bigger picture

like one who is **watching a basketball game through a telescope**, you may miss other relevant aspects of the situation

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ADHD Working Memory Impairments can bias and impair motivation

- ◆ Is important for **holding in mind multiple thoughts and emotions**, relevant to any specific situation or task
- ◆ **Impairment in working memory** is a key aspect of ADHD
- ◆ Often people with ADHD are **unable to keep multiple emotions in mind at same time so they can prioritize**

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What can we say re: Marshmallow Test?

- ◆ It highlights **one aspect of EF**, not the full complexity of it
- ◆ For some, **EF impairments** show up in **preschool**; for others only **much later**
- ◆ Developing adequate EF is **more difficult for those with ADHD**; not easily taught
- ◆ Yet **many with ADHD find much success**

Cultivation of Hope

- ◆ **Plant seeds: individualized dreams**
- ◆ **Fertilize strengths with encouragement**
nurturing of personal dreams, possible selves, realistic, but not too pessimistic Keep "at this time" perspective
- ◆ **Utilize fine-tuned medication & additional support when needed**
- ◆ **Recognize the limits of our powers**

Realistic & Unrealistic Hope

- ◆ **Unrealistic Hope**: ignores reality of what it takes to meet challenges and suggests "you can do anything you want" as though just wanting does it.
- ◆ **Realistic Hope**: recognizes realistic requirements and utilizes resources to select realistic goals and to support efforts needed to meet challenges in short-term and longer term.

Key Points

1. Those with ADHD often have chronic **difficulties with motivation in many, but not all situations**
2. Motivation is shaped by complex processes that integrate **idiosyncratic emotion-laden memories** that shape how we see and think about things
3. Working memory & focusing impairments characteristic of ADHD **may impair motivation** by causing **emotional flooding or constricted focus**

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