

Marshmallow Experiment

..... source unknown (adapted and written by Amy Fox)

In the 1960s, a Stanford professor named Walter Mischel began conducting a series of important psychological studies.

In the most famous experiment Mischel ever conducted, was what was known as the Marshmallow Experiment, Mischel and his team tested hundreds of children– most of them around the ages of 4 and 5 years old– and revealed what is now believed to be one of the most important characteristics for success in health, work and life.

The experiment began by bringing each child into a private room, sitting them down in a chair, and placing a marshmallow on the table in front of them. At this point, the researcher offered a deal to the child. The researcher told the child that he was going to leave the room and that if the child did not eat the marshmallow while he was away, then they would be rewarded with a second marshmallow. However, if the child decided to eat the first one before the researcher came back, then they would not get a second marshmallow.

The choice was simple: one treat right now or two treats later.

Some kids jumped up and ate the first marshmallow as soon as the researcher closed the door. Others wiggled and bounced and scooted in their chairs as they tried to restrain themselves, but eventually gave in to temptation a few minutes later. And finally, a few of the children did manage to wait the entire time.

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But, it wasn't the treat that made this study so famous. The interesting part came years later. As the years rolled on and the children grew up, the researchers conducted follow up studies and tracked each child's progress in a number of areas. What they found was astounding.

The children who were willing to delay gratification and waited to receive the second marshmallow ended up having higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, lower likelihood of obesity, better responses to stress, better social skills as reported by their parents, and generally better scores in a range of other life measures. As it turns out, the ability to delay gratification was critical for success in life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PROMPTS

OPENING CLASS

We live in a world where success is defined by accomplishments—our identity is defined by our job title, how much money we make, the size and location of our house and the brand names of our possessions.

We seek this gratification. We seek the experiences that give us pleasure and because we get attached to these highs, we create ideals we can't achieve consistently and as a result we suffer.

But, what if we could delay instant gratification? What if we could let go of the need to achieve more and do more and instead strive for balance and moderation?

DURING CLASS

BEFORE TELLING THE STORY

To maintain balance and moderation, we must be disciplined in our mind.

Notice where your mind, your Chitta, is right now? Can you come back to the presence of your breath?

AFTER TELLING THE STORY

With breath comes awareness and with awareness we can make conscious decisions—we can delay instant gratification and can live a happier, healthier life.

"The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work."

CLOSING CLASS

Self-mastery is the greatest skill we can learn and develop and it's what allows us to master our mind and live a conscious life.

This week, where can you delay instant gratification?

EXTRAS

4 Ways to Train Your Ability to Delay Instant Gratification

1. Start incredibly small. Make your new habit "so easy you can't say no."
2. Improve one thing, by one percent. Do it again tomorrow.
3. Use the "Chain Method" to maintain consistency.
4. Find a way to get started in less than 2 minutes.