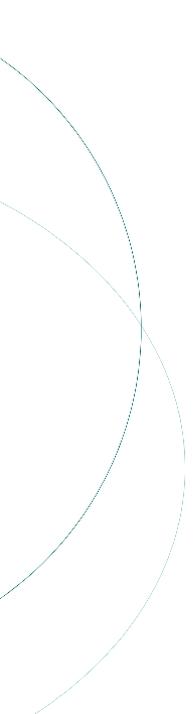


Just say no?

Addiction and self-control



Chemical dependence or addiction is seen as both a serious threat to self-control and as the outcome of a series of failures of self-control or self-regulation.

But what, more precisely, is self-control?

How is it exercised?

What kinds of internal and external circumstances can undermine it?

How is self-control related to the good life?

The standard view

- Self-control is called for in the face of temptation which inclines you towards something you judge it better not to do.
- When we think of temptations we usually think in terms of appetitive desires – for junk food or alcohol and so forth. The paradigmatic loss of self-control involves defeat by strong contrary desires. The metaphor is of a battle between reason and desire.

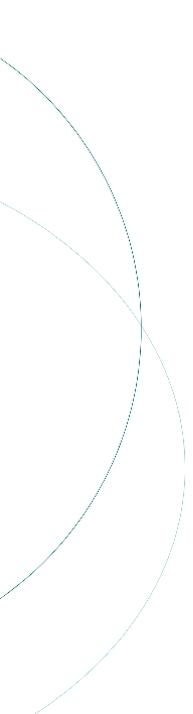
An influential model from psychology: The strength model of self-control

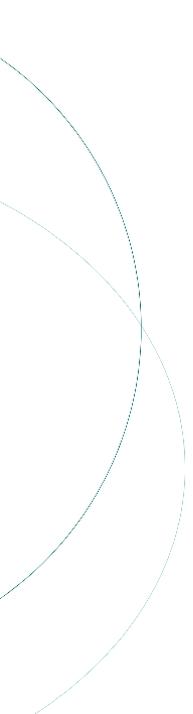
- Self-control depends on a resource that operates like strength or energy, and depletion of this resource makes self-control less effective. (Baumeister et al)
- Levy (under review) argues that this resource is controlled cognitive processing capacity.

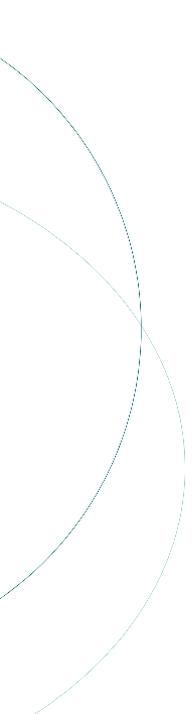
Dual processing models of cognition

System One	System Two
Fast and effortless	Slow and effortful
Unintentional, runs automatically	Intentional and controllable
Inaccessible, only results enter awareness	Consciously accessible and viewable
Does not demand attentional resources	Demands limited attentional resources

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- Many common techniques of self-control exploit cognitive resources.
 - Narrowing, expanding, diverting the focus of attention
 - Mischel, marshmallows, and the rules of delay:
 - Don't focus on the consummatory qualities of the reward
 - cool ideation “I am waiting for two marshmallows”, “the marshmallows are puffy like clouds”
 - Connection between early self-regulation and the development of conscience

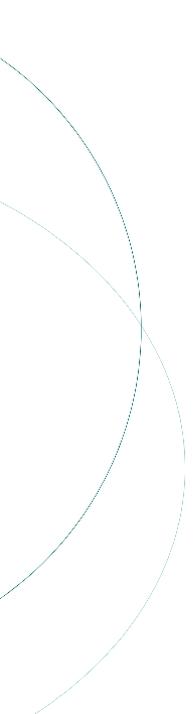
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- When we are under cognitive load (i.e., distracted by other tasks) or our attentional resources are depleted due to fatigue, stress, etc, system one dominates and our behaviour will be more strongly influenced by our automatic, affect driven, attitudes.

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- A number of studies have shown that subjects who have already completed a self-control task: e.g., regulating emotional response while watching a movie, choosing radishes over freshly baked cookies, suppressing forbidden thoughts,
 - Do worse than controls on subsequent self-control tasks

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- Baumeister suggests that willpower can be restored by sleep, positive emotional experiences, glucose, and strengthened by self-regulatory exercises such as monitoring your posture or keeping a food journal

What this model suggests about addiction

- It might not be that addicts are worse at self-control than non-addicts. They just have more constant calls on their willpower. Resisting addictive cravings depletes the addicted person's effortful controlled processing capacity and eventually they give in.
- The picture that emerges is consistent with one popular in the neuroscience of addiction of the brain being hijacked
- It's also consistent with the dominant philosophical model of the threat to agency posed by strong and intrusive desires.
- I suggest this model while accurate as far as it goes is too narrow.

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- We need to look more closely at the variety of ways in which our control of our actions may be threatened in order to more fully understand what is going on in the lives of addicts.

I'm going to begin by looking at single actions and what can go wrong and then expand the story

Internal threats to intentional control

- Shyness, anxiety, fear, anger, grief, may all interfere with the capacity to perform/bring off some valued or desired action.
- Some examples:
- Giving the eulogy at the funeral of a loved one without breaking down
- Asking Arnie out while looking into his piercing blue eyes
- Executing the dive to earn Olympic selection.
- In all these cases I lose control of my action

External threats to successful action

- The stock market plunges when I'm trying to make my fortune.
- The wind blows as I'm trying to hit the target.
- A loud mobile phone ring spoils the telling of a witty anecdote.
- In these cases too I lose control. I fail to do what I intend: make a fortune, hit the target, amuse the audience.

How to exercise intentional control

- Regaining control of what I'm doing requires that I regulate or adjust for my *internal* states - deep breathing to calm myself or phoning Arnie instead of asking him out face to face
- and often also that I regulate the *external* conditions or that I adjust for those conditions – I can't prevent the wind from blowing but I can make allowances for it as I take the shot. I can ask audiences to switch off their mobile phones so the lecture isn't interrupted.

Why intentional control isn't the full story

- Mere intentional control may be exercised by a hopeless heroin addict or alcoholic (absent effects of intoxication) as efficiently as by a model of temperance.
- Mere intentional self-control may be exercised in accordance with the individual's values *or* may be exercised in the service of an action which runs counter to one's values - steeling oneself to throw the rock through the window to impress the gang.
- Repressing feelings of sympathy for your victim

Autonomous self-control

- The kind of self-control that those in the grip of addiction most often lack is autonomous control. They lack the capacity to lead their lives in accordance with a defensible conception of the good and valuable life.

Elements of the good life

- Synchronic value
- Diachronic value
- How these two forms of value interact
- The connection between being an effective agent and enjoying the diachronic goods.

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- *...the standard view tempts us to imagine that the principal or sole internal threat to agency is from our own unruly impulses. I think this is false. Careful reflection on how our lives as agents may internally fail suggests there are an array of related psychological states that undermine agency not by supplying uncontrollable motivating forces but by depriving the individual of either*

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- *Interest in leading the life of an agent depends on (1) lack of estrangement from one's own normative perspective; (2) a belief in the effectiveness of instrumental reasoning; and (3) confidence in one's relative security from disastrous misfortune and indecent harm. Those who are estranged from their normative outlook lack the desires to pursue what they value, including what they most deeply value...Those who lose confidence in the effectiveness of instrumental reasoning or in their security from disastrous misfortune have reason to give up on agential planning generally, not just*

Threats to autonomous control

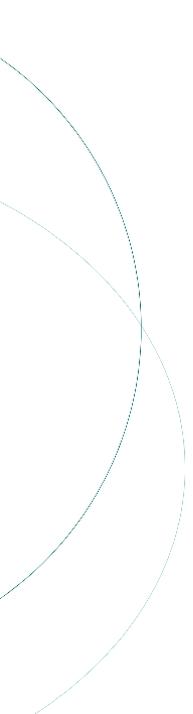
- Alienation from one's values
- Lack of confidence in one's capacity to achieve what one values.
- Both of these are salient in addiction

How addiction threatens the good life

stigma, discrimination,
exclusion, stereotyping
→ low self-esteem, low
efficacy, alienation.

loss of diachronic value:
relationships,
employment, housing,
health are unattainable
goods ↔ focus on
available synchronic
goods eg, drugs.





- *...first and foremost is I'm extremely lonely...I'm totally unemployable. I'm over the hill, got no references, no appreciable skills, patchy work history at best, former alcoholic and addict, homeless...it's very depressing. I mean [participating in treatment] is not the answer to all my problems. Recovery is not going to make my problems go away (Weinberg and Kogel, 1995, p. 217).*

- *...it's hard for me to stay clean, because my life when I'm clean is so horrible. They say it gets better, but for me it never got better. I knew when I relapsed that it wasn't the answer, that I was gonna be even worse off, but I didn't care. I just wanted relief from that misery, (Weinberg and Kogel, 1995, p. 218).*

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- *I've got 32 days [of sobriety] and really happy about that, but since I'm not drinking anymore, I can't go to all the places I used to go to drink. I mean I don't want to go to those places, but on the other hand now all I do is sit around and watch TV all day, and it's lonely as hell. I mean it sounds awful, but I turn on the TV even though there's nothing I want to watch because it's kind of company...(Weinberg and Kogel, 1995, p. 220)*
 - *Drugs and alcohol were used to medicate the extreme pain of traumatic events as well as to 'quieten' aspects of mental disorders such as hearing voices. Bill (57) commented that without drug and alcohol use, he would not have survived the terror of having to sleep rough and would have committed suicide (Robinson 2003)*

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- We need adequate resources, both psychological and social to “just say no”.
 - Autonomy can be socially supported or socially thwarted (MacKenzie)
 - Most of our projects and all of our relationships are engaged in with other people and require social structures and social support for their success.
 - Self-control turns out to be a complex achievement. Just as it takes a village to bring up a child it takes a community to support the virtue of individuals.