EVERYDAY TEMPTATIONS
AN EXPERIENCE SAMPLING STUDY ON HOW PEOPLE CONTROL THEIR DESIRES

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Everyday Desires

- Self-control as a conflict between desires and self-regulatory goals (e.g., Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009)
- How does desire control unfold in everyday life?
Research Questions

- How often do people experience various desires?
- How conflicted do they feel about these desires?
- How often do people try to resist their desires?
- How successful are these resistance attempts?
- How do situational and personality factors shape the experience and control of desire?
- What are the emotional consequences of yielding to/resisting temptation?
Method

- **Sample**
  - $N = 205$ (66% female) adults from Würzburg, Germany
  - 70% students (from 49 different majors)
  - Mean age = 25 (range 18 to 55)

- **Experience Sampling**
  - 7 random signals per day (within 2-hour blocks)
  - for 1 week
Main Measures

Desire?

Desire Strength
1-7

Desire Domain
(n =15)

Desire Sub-Domain
(n =76)

Conflict with goals
0-4

Goal Importance
0-4

Resistance (yes vs. no)

Enactment (yes vs. no)

Momentary Affect
1-7

Guilt
0-4

Pride
0-4

Regret
0-4
Person-Level Variables

- **Personality Traits**
  - Bis/Bas (Carver & White, 1994)
  - Trait self-control (Tangney et al., 2004)
  - Perfectionism (Garner et al., 1983)
  - Narcissistic Entitlement (Campbell 2004)
I. DESCRIPTIVE AND DOMAIN-RELATED ANALYSES (Hofmann, Vohs, Baumeister, in press)
Frequency and Percentage Data

Total # of reports: 10,558 (Mean response rate: 92%)

- „have no current desire“ (50%)
- „have current desire“ (50%)
  - „did not attempt to resist“ (62%)
  - „tried to resist“ (38%)
  - „enacted desire“ (70%)
  - „did not enact desire“ (30%)
  - „enacted desire“ (17%)
  - „did not enact desire“ (83%)

Power of Self-Control
Some Weekly Patterns

**Eating**

**Alcohol**

**Coffee**

**Spending**

**Media**
A Map of Desire

Desire Strength vs. Conflict

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Media
- Spending
- Eating
- Work
- Hygiene
- Social contact
- Sexual desire
- Non-alcoholic drinks
- Sports
- Leisure
- Sleep
Self-regulation failure rate
\[= p(\text{enactment} | \text{resistance})\]

Above average
Below average

Conflict
Desire Strength

- Tobacco
- Media
- Spending
- Alcohol
- Coffee
- Eating
- Work
- Hygiene
- Social contact
- Sports
- Sleep
- Leisure
- Non-alcoholic drinks
- Sexual desire
II. TEST OF GENERAL FRAMEWORK

(Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, in press)
Empirical Model (Multilevel Analyses)

- **Conflict**
  - $B = 0.53^{***}$
- **Resistance (Self-Control)**
  - $B = 0.03$ ns
  - $B = 2.40^{***}$
  - $B = 0.16^{***}$
- **Desire Strength**
  - $r = 0.0003$
- **Enactment**
  - $B = 0.08^{***}$
Desire Strength × Resistance Interaction

\[ B = .16, \ p = .004 \]
Empirical Model (Multilevel Analyses)

**Conflict**

- \( B = -2.40^{***} \)

**Resistance (Self-Control)**

- \( B = .53^{***} \)
- \( B = -.03 \text{ ns} \)
- \( B = .16^{***} \)

**Desire Strength**

- \( r = .0003 \)

**Enactment**

- \( B = .08^{***} \)
III. SITUATIONAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Alcohol intake
Ego depletion
Presence of enactment models
Alcohol Intake

- Clear support from literature that it acts as a disinhibitor (Steele & Southwick, 1985; Fillmore & Vogel-Sprott, 1999; Hofmann & Friese, 2008)

- Not clear if it also changes desire strength
  - Folklore suggests it does….”Drink. . . it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance.” (Shakespeare, Macbeth)
Alcohol Intake and Self-Control Failure

To what extent were you under the influence of alcohol?

\[ \chi^2 = 8.15, \ p = .04 \]
Alcohol Intake and Desire Strength

To what extent were you under the influence of alcohol?

χ² = 17.3, p < .001
Ego Depletion
(e.g., Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000)

- **Strength model**: preceding acts of self-control reduce available self-control resources for subsequent self-control
- **Depletion score**: sum of previous resistance attempts on same day, weighted by temporal distance
Resource Depletion in the „Wild“

**Graph:**
- **Y-axis:** Probability of Enactment
- **X-axis:** Resource Depletion Score
- **Lines:**
  - **Black line:** No Resistance
  - **Red line:** Resistance
- **Legend:**
  - **No Resistance**
  - **Resistance**
- **Percentages:**
  - 0% at score 0
  - 15% at score 10
  - 37% at score 30

**Equation:**
- Interaction $B = .16$, $p = .004$
Presence of Enactment Models

- Presence of social models
  - May reduce willingness to resist
  - May prime desire-related behavior
  - lower resistance rates, $B = -0.24, p < 0.001$
  - higher enactment rates, $B = 0.55, p < 0.001$
Presence of Enactment Models

Main effect: $B = .55$, $p < .001$
Models × Resistance: $B = -.34$, $p < .001$
Summary so far

- Alcohol (+)
- Goal Importance (+), # of Goals (+)

Conflict

- Presence of Others (+)
- Enactment Models (-)

Resistance (Self-Control)

- Alcohol (+)
- Resource Depletion (+)
- Enactment Models (-)
- Desire Strength (+)

Desire Strength

- Alcohol (+)
- Desire Duration (+)

Behavior Enactment

- Presence of Others (-)
- Enactment Models (+)
IV. PERSONALITY EFFECTS

Bis/Bas (Carver & White, 1994)
Trait self-control (Tangney et al., 2004)
Perfectionism (Garner et al., 1983)
Narcissistic Entitlement (Campbell 2004)
Personality Findings Summary

- Trait Self-Control (-)
- Perfectionism (+)
- Entitlement (-)

Corr. between TSC and external problem index (raters): -.20**
Discussion

- People Want.

NEWS IN BRIEF

New Study Reveals Majority Of Americans Want

SEPTEMBER 5, 2011 | ISSUE 47-36

CHICAGO—A study of more than 1,200 subjects by the Consumer Research Institute at Loyola University has found that a significant majority of U.S. citizens want. "Regardless of their age, gender, class, education, or religion, Americans are remarkably alike in their capacity to want," Dr. Stanley Murcheson told reporters Tuesday, noting that 33 percent of survey respondents indicated they not only want, but want really bad. "And among those who want, a growing number also demand, feel entitled to, and actually expect." The study concluded that while more Americans than ever desperately need, fewer than 6 percent of them will ever get. 🌿
More Elaborated Discussion

- People spend substantial parts of the day dealing with desires
  - desires felt very often (73% of reports contained at least one desire; 50% at least one current desire)
  - majority unproblematic and not resisted
  - around 40% of desires actively resisted (self-control)
  - self-control reduced enactment from 70% to 17%

- Extrapolating to 16 waking hours a day
  - desiring something right now: ≈ 50% of beeps (8 hours/day)
  - resisting problematic desires: ≈ 19% of beeps (3 hours/day)
  - enacting previously resisted desires: ≈ 3% of beeps (half hour/day)
Situational Moderators

- Desire strength: strong desires harder to resist than weak ones
- Alcohol: not only impairs self-control but also enhances desire experience
- Ego depletion effects in the wild
- Interpersonal dimension of self-control (Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011)
  - Presence of others inhibits behavior
  - Presence of enactment models reduces resistance
Personality Highlights

- Trait self-control: less desire, less conflict, less resistance (!)
  - Proactive self-control: Avoiding temptation in the first place
  - Hard to measure in the lab

- Perfectionism: Highly motivated, tortured souls whose powerful impulses often clash with other goals

- Entitlement: wanting something is ample and sufficient reason to have it; unlikely to see reasons to hold back (“you deserve it” mentality)
Limitations/Avenues

- Introspective limits
- Intrusive nature (intervention)
- Culture-dependency
- Bridging levels of analysis (e.g., Berkman, Falk, & Lieberman, 2011)
Thank you for your attention!

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