

When I Wait, I Get What I Want - Behavioral Economics | Office of Research

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When I Wait, I Get What I Want...Behavioral Economics, with Dr. Gregory Madden

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This episode of Instead features our conversation with Dr. Gregory Madden, this year's recipient of the D. Wynne Thorne Career Research Award. Dr. Madden is a professor and researcher in USU's Department of Psychology, specifically the Behavioral Analysis Program. Dr. Madden's research is focused on impulsivity and decision making. His work looks at how to reduce impulsive decision making, through tests with human and nonhuman subjects.

According to Dr. Madden, impulsive decision making has a strong correlation with destructive behaviors such as substance abuse and gambling. Dr. Madden's studies of impulsiveness revolve around patience, and the ability or inability to wait. According to his research, the inability to wait to get something better correlates strongly with substance abuse in humans. "Those who say the delayed outcome or reward isn't worth very much are those who are prone to substance abuse, gambling, obesity, etc." says Dr. Madden. "We know the two are correlated but we don't know if there's a causal relation between the two." This is seen in both the human and nonhuman subjects. The majority of the research is conducted with rat subjects. Rats are placed in a chamber and given results based on a level they press. One is delayed and one is instant, which allows evaluation into how many impulsive decisions the rat made. Huge differences were observed between

the rats, and the rats who make a lot of impulsive choices ended up being more susceptible when presented with small amounts of cocaine.

The results of the nonhuman research are then applied to human research with preschool-aged subjects.

Like the rats, the children are given arranged opportunities to wait. With incentivizing through structuring "games" with virtual rewards and narratives, the children are given strategies during the delay, such as repeating something to themselves (when I wait I get what I want), and they see results. The hope is to ethically incentivize kids to eat healthily and other positive behaviors.

For more information about the highlights and challenges behind Dr. Madden's fascinating research and how he thinks we can teach others to be less impulsive, listen to Instead on your favorite podcast app.

