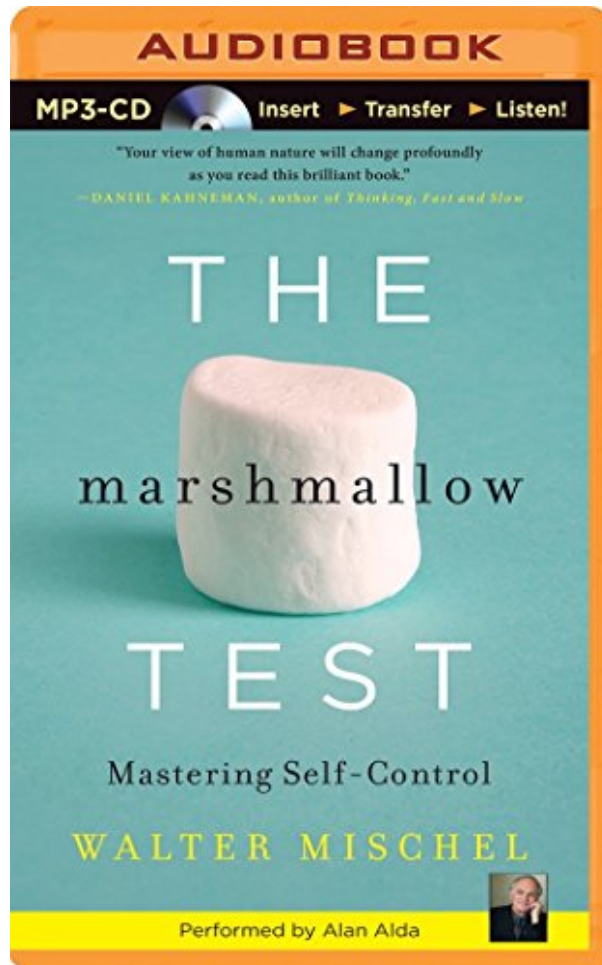
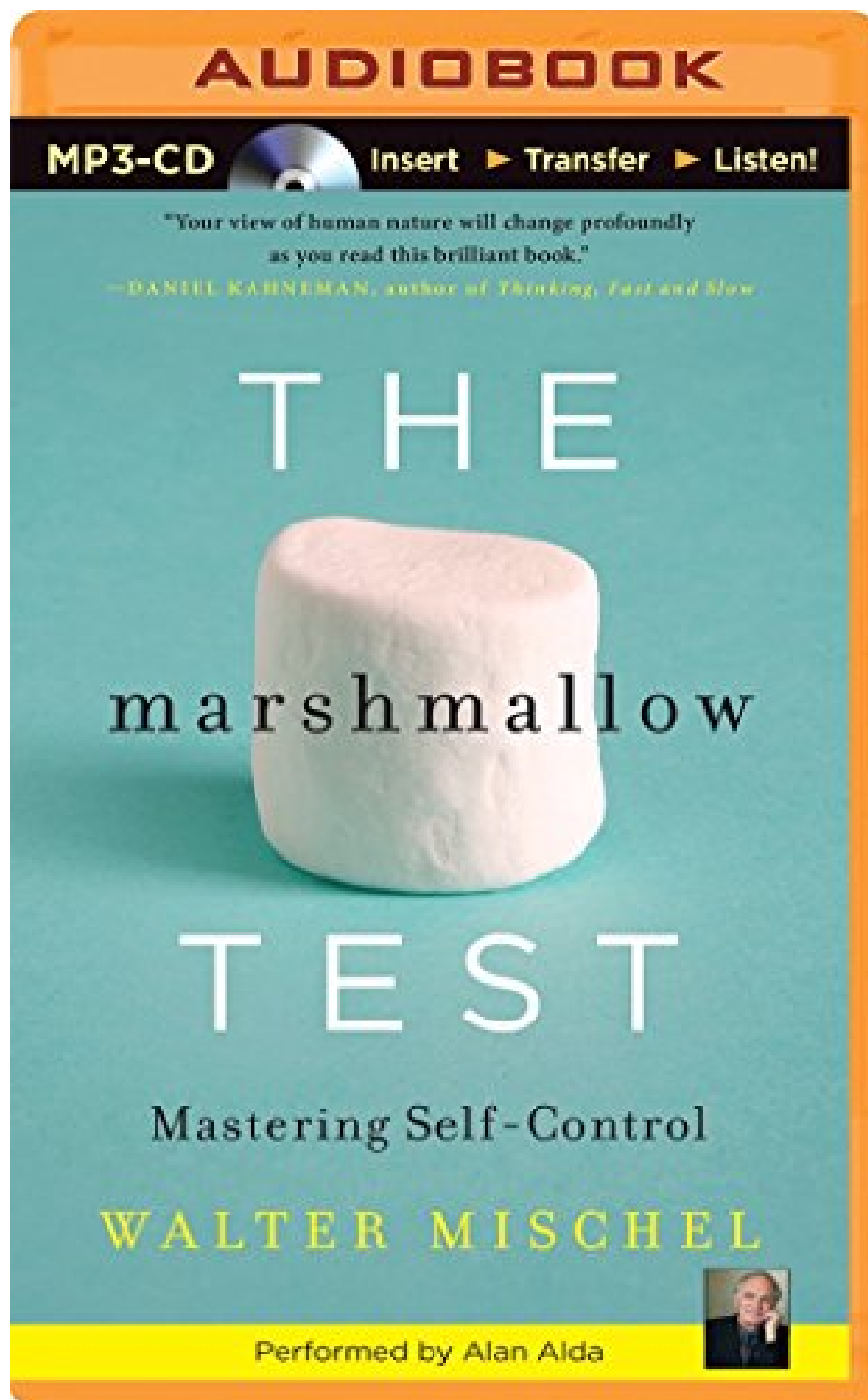


THE MARSHMALLOW TEST: MASTERING SELF-CONTROL BY WALTER MISCHEL



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Review

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THE MARSHMALLOW TEST: MASTERING SELF-CONTROL BY WALTER MISCHEL PDF

Renowned psychologist Walter Mischel, designer of the famous Marshmallow Test, explains what self-control is and how to master it.

A child is presented with a marshmallow and given a choice: Eat this one now, or wait and enjoy two later. What will she do? And what are the implications for her behavior later in life?

The world's leading expert on self-control, Walter Mischel has proven that the ability to delay gratification is critical for a successful life, predicting higher SAT scores, better social and cognitive functioning, a healthier lifestyle and a greater sense of self-worth. But is willpower prewired, or can it be taught?

In *The Marshmallow Test*, Mischel explains how self-control can be mastered and applied to challenges in everyday life—from weight control to quitting smoking, overcoming heartbreak, making major decisions, and planning for retirement. With profound implications for the choices we make in parenting, education, public policy and self-care, *The Marshmallow Test* will change the way you think about who we are and what we can be.

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Most helpful customer reviews

160 of 171 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting Read, but Potentially Misleading

By Brandon Schultz

Mischel is a gifted researcher and writer. His book masterfully summarizes a long line of research on self-control and motivation that, as a school psychologist, I have been fascinated with for some time. Thankfully, Mischel is able to step outside the academic stodginess of research articles to tell the stories behind them. However, I think many readers will be disappointed by Mischel's discussion of the implications of this research because he ultimately ends with what I would call "evidence-based platitudes." His recommendations for helping children develop self-control consist of strategies that virtually every reader would have presupposed. Namely, reward effort (not outcomes), be consistent, and be a good role model. If you are looking for a life-altering read, these "insights" are likely to disappoint (judging from the more critical reviews here on Amazon).

But the reason I give the book three stars (despite the engaging writing) is that in several sections throughout the book Mischel seems to suggest that research-informed self-control training can only be found in programs like KIPP charter schools. In truth, these insights have been discussed in the educational literature for a very long time, and I sincerely doubt that there is a teacher education program anywhere that does not train these strategies. The implementation, however, varies as a function of local resources and parent support (two things that KIPP definitely has going for it). In another example, Mischel highlights a specific study on computer-based cognitive training, even though meta-analyses of this literature suggests that it is, at best, minimally effective in immediate, near-transfer learning tasks (no benefit for delayed, near- or far-transfer tasks). I'm sure many readers will read this section and come away with the impression that cognitive training is the wave of the future (it's not).

In short, Mischel relies heavily on anecdotes to tell his stories, and the selection of these anecdotes inescapably creates subtle and unfortunate spin that folks unfamiliar with the literature could easily misinterpret.

119 of 126 people found the following review helpful.

The best book on self-control thus far, by the man who started it all.

By Dr. Chuck Chakrapani

The Marshmallow Test by Walter Mischel, the man who started it all, is a book on self-control, probably the best one on the subject thus far. This book is everything that the currently leading book on the subject (*Willpower* by Baumeister and Tierney) is not: intellectually coherent, scientifically sophisticated, and concerned more about sound reasoning than about sound bites.

Research on self-control was probably started in earnest in the 1960s with Walter Mischel's celebrated

"Marshmallow Test". Children around the age of five were given a choice between one marshmallow now or two marshmallows later, a delay lasting up to 20 minutes. While some ate the marshmallow right away, others used different strategies to control themselves such as averting their gaze, pulling their hair, squirming, closing their eyes or just sniffing the marshmallow and putting it back. The implications of this research came to life when researchers went back to the same children several years later. They found children who exercised self-control and waited 15 or 20 minutes to double their payoff had higher grade point averages, made more money and were fitter (as measured by BMI) when they were adults.

Genetics clearly plays a role in the level of self-control one has. The message of the book is that genetics is not destiny. Willpower is a cognitive ability and, because our brains are much more plastic than had been imagined in the past, we can substantially increase this crucial ability to control ourselves. This book shows how to gain more self-control.

Paralleling Daniel Kahneman's model of "fast" and "slow" thinking, Mischel describes two systems in the brain: "hot" (limbic) and "cold" (prefrontal cortex). The hot system deals with immediate rewards and threats while the cold system deals with delayed consequences. The key to self-control is cooling the hot system where appropriate. We need to learn to activate our prefrontal cortex first before the limbic system kicks in.

Can we actually increase our self-control? Mischel's response is yes, if you believe you can and if you really want to. In other words, you can increase your self-control if you approach it with a mindset that believes that increasing self-control is possible as opposed to a helpless mindset that believes willpower is a limited resource over which you have no control. But just having the right mindset may not be enough. We need strategies to cool our warm system.

Commonly used strategies for self-control often include removing the source of temptations (don't have junk foods around, if you are trying to eat healthy) or surrounding yourself with people who do not eat junk food. But these strategies are likely to fail without effective pre-commitment. You can remove all cigarettes from sight and yet mooch them from others. You can clear junk food from the kitchen and yet help yourself to sugar-laden cookies in business meetings. Mischel suggests that we should use more robust strategies based on research. Some such strategies are:

* **MAKE UP "IF...THEN" RULES.** We tend to react to cues out of habit. Create new habits with new cues. IF I go to a restaurant, THEN I will start my meal with a salad. IF I get an email notification, THEN I will finish the next item on my to-do list before reading the email. When well-rehearsed and practiced, the desired behavior is triggered automatically without effort.

* **COOL THE NOW, HEAT THE LATER.** Vividly imagine the negative consequences of immediate gratification: Whenever you are tempted to smoke, visualize the picture of a cancerous lung. If you are tempted overeat, visualize the picture of a person who is unfit and out of shape.

* **DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THE SITUATION.** Refer to yourself in the third person. Instead of saying "I've to finish the report by tomorrow", I can say "Chuck has to finish the report by tomorrow." This way you distance yourself and change your role to that of an observer. This makes the completion of the task easier.

* **SHIFT YOUR FOCUS FROM HOT TO COOL PROPERTIES.** Shift your attention from the hot to the not-so-hot attributes of the stimulus: Instead of looking at the chocolate as a tasty flavorful treat look at it as a brown square, wrapped in paper. By focusing your attention on the cool attributes of a stimulus, we can decrease its appeal.

What about all that talk we hear about willpower being a limited resource, the mysterious "ego energy" - whatever that is - being "depleted" fast dragging your willpower along with it (which you can apparently restore with the help of glucose) and the oft-quoted generalization that "willpower is like a muscle"? Mischel wisely ignores such half-baked and sound bite oriented interpretation of research data by Baumeister and associates and gently points to the work done by Carol Dweck of Stanford University, which suggests self-control is not a limited resource and one's mindset can affect one's level of self-control.

While the book summarizes relevant research leading to its conclusions, it is much more than that. It is part a self-help book and part a look back at the work of an eminent psychologist who, at 84 years age, has chosen to share his wisdom gained through a lifetime of research in his first-ever nonacademic book. A man with nothing prove after 55 years in the academe and over 200 publications to his credit, Walter Mischel wears his wisdom lightly. He says in the introduction that he imagined himself "having a leisurely conversation with you, the reader". What a conversation it is!

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Great stuff though not always the easiest read

By Mark Loves Kindle Books

There is a lot to love here. First, this is the book by the guy who invented the famed Marshmallow Test so being able to read about it from its creator is helpful and interesting. Secondly, he does a great job making the ideas of self-control practical and useful. I thought it lagged a little in the middle and isn't always an easy read but it's solid and very useful. Great stuff. If you persevere you will learn how to build your self-control or help your child grow their self-control.

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