

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, December 1, 2014

Where: 265 JMHH

When: 12:00 – 1:15 pm

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Matter Over Mind:

Situational Strategies for Self-Control

ABSTRACT: Exercising self-control is often difficult, whether it takes the form declining a drink in order to drive home safely, passing on the chocolate cake to stay on our diet, or ignoring email so that we can finish an important paper. But enacting self-control isn't *always* difficult, particularly when it takes the form of proactively choosing or changing situations in ways that diminish the strength of undesirable impulses or potentiate more desirable ones. Examples of situational self-control include the partygoer who chooses a comfortable seat far from where drinks are being poured, the dieter who asks the waiter not to bring around the dessert cart, and the student who deliberately closes his email browser before studying. Because undesirable impulses tend to grow stronger over time, situational self-control strategies are often highly effective in preventing undesirable action. Ironically, the efficiency and farsightedness of such techniques may explain why they are understudied: Manipulating our circumstances to advantage minimizes the in-the-moment experience of intrapsychic struggle typically associated with exercising self-control.

