

Rapt: Attention And the Focused Life  
Pages 1-28

- theory of everything: your life- who you are, what you think, feel, and do, and what you love- is the sum of what your focus on
- attention: the concentration of mental powers; the direction or application of the mind to any object of sense or thought
- The formal discovery of attention is often credited to the German Physician Wilhelm Wundt, But William James (1842-1910), his great contemporary and fellow founder of psychology, remains its philosopher king.
- A philosopher before he became a psychologist was a pragmatist who rejected abstract verities that conflict with the individual's own "feelings of reality" and experience of the way things are.
  - he accepted evolution, but not the implication that nature rigidly determines your behavior.
- Because your mind is profoundly shaped by what it imposes on itself, James argued, where you choose to focus it is vitally important.
- James offered one of the earliest scientific definitions of attention in *The Principles of Psychology (1890)*, "it is the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalisation, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence. It implies a withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others."
- By the 1960's neuroscience began to transform the study of behavior in general and attention in particular with new technology that revealed much more of what goes on in the "black box".
  - At the National Institutes of Health, researchers were able to record primates electrical signals from the brains of primates while they performed focusing tasks
    - Over the past 20 years this task has been accelerated by new tools like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and the magnetoencephalography (MEG), that allows scientists to see parts of the brain activate and appear to light up and turn different colors when people think, feel, and act.
- There is no single, widely accepted, way to measure attention, but many tests can measure the efficiency of its different aspects by analyzing how you perform various tasks.
  - i.e: Visual Search experiment
    - scientists measure how long it takes you to find a particular target among distractors
- Research now suggests that like consciousness, attention is a term for complex neurological and behavioral business that seem like more than the sum of its parts.
- Neurosciences groundbreaking insight into attention is the discover that its basic mechanism is a process of selection

- Involuntary Bottom-Up Attention: This two part neurological sorting operation allows you to focus on the most salient (physical objects) or high value mental subject and suppress the rest.
  - Bottom Up: What think is it I need to home in on
- Top Down Attention: Enables us to choose to pursue difficult goals, the deliberate process is the key to designing your daily experience, because it lets you decide what to focus on what to suppress
  - Top Down: what do *you* want to concentrate on
- Rapt: completely absorbed, engrossed, fascinated.
- no matter who you are, your joie de vivre mostly derives from attention to someone or something that interests you.
- Focusing on upbeat emotions such as hope and kindness, literally, not just figuratively, expand your world, just as dwelling on negative feelings shrinks it.

Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life  
Pages 99-132

- There is one insight into both productivity and satisfaction that all the best selling decalogues share: the importance of laser like attention to your goal
- According to Nicholas Hobbs, a 20th Century psychologist, you need to find a task that isn't too hard, but isn't too easy
  - too hard, you become overwhelmed
  - too easy, you become bored
- Either attention or Motivation-the drive that impels you toward a goal can jumpstart "flow", but both of these must converge to sustain it.
  - Flow: when you are so focused on your work that time flies by, your ego drops away, and you act intuitively.
    - "I was born for this."
  - About 20% of people "flow" once or more a day, while about 15% do not flow at all
    - One major reason for the poor quality is because most people do not know which activities provide enjoyment and total focus
  - In a study, subjects flowed for 44% of the time when playing sports or games, 34% of the time when doing a hobby, and only about 13% of the time watching television
    - a way to avoid leisure time dissatisfaction is to pay as much attention to scheduling a productive night or weekend as you do a workday.
    - In the short term, choosing work and play that requires rapt focus and all of your skill provides satisfying, productive experiences
    - In the Long term, you must only look upon your youth experiences and the things that had influenced and motivated you
      - As parents they can reflect their experiences on to their children so that they may ultimately find motivation and pleasure in doing an activity they may be to afraid to try
    - Overtime, a focus on challenging focused work and leisure produces not only a better daily experience but a more interesting person
- Principle of Bounded Rationality: we are reasonable enough beings but are sometimes liable to focus on the wrong things. our thinking gets mixed up, not so much by our emotions but rather our "cognitive illusions" (mistaken intuitions).
  - the key to why we pay more attention to your thoughts about life than actually living is summed up in the "fortune cookie maxim"(focusing illusion).
    - "nothing in life is as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it. Why? Because you are thinking about it."
      - to test the focusing illusion you only have to ask yourself how happy you are.
        - this automatically summons your remembering self, which will focus on any recent change in your life

- you will then think of the event, which will increase its import and influence your answer
- It is difficult to focus on the experiencing self's reaction because the remembering self focuses on your life rather than the thing itself.
  - The two different understandings between the two selves is known as a "complicated story" and therefore should not measure the quality of our lives on memories alone.

## High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-being

Analysis of 450,000 responses to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, a daily survey of 1,000 U.S. residents conducted by Gallup Organization in 2008 and 2009 (telephone interview)

- o Found that emotional well being (the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, fascination, anxiety, sadness, anger, and affection that make one's life pleasant or unpleasant) and life evaluation (a person's thoughts about his or her life) have different correlates

Income and education are more closely related to life evaluation

Health, care giving, loneliness, and smoking are stronger predictors of daily emotions.

When plotted against log income, life evaluation rises steadily.

- o The logarithmic transformation represents a basic fact of perception known as Weber's Law, which applies generally to quantitative dimensions of perception and judgment

- o Focuses on percentage change not the absolute amount

- o Emotional well-being also rises with log income, but there is no progress

According to the data, more money does not necessarily buy happiness, but less money is associated with emotional pain

In conclusion, high income buys life satisfaction but not happiness, and low

income is associated both with low life evaluation and low emotional well-being.

Here is the Income Level at Which Money Won't Make You Happier in Each State

Happiness levels differ in each state because of the cost of living/ the income salary one needs to live comfortably

o Ex: You need a higher income to live comfortably in Hawaii, but schooling beyond an annual income of about \$75,000.

is great and the land is beautiful as opposed to Mississippi where the education is not as great and there is a higher rate of obesity, but the cost of living is much lower

2010 Princeton study by Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton found that at the national level, making more than \$75,000 per year won't improve your daily happiness

o But, your "life evaluation"—how you feel about your life and

Keep in mind that outside factors such as the number of kids you have or the amount of debt you carry will also affect your happiness

accomplishments—can rise with higher income and education levels

Lower paid lawyers are happier.

Success in the legal field and happiness/ well-being have zero correlation according to a survey of 6,200 lawyers

o Lawyers in public-service jobs who made the least money were most likely to report being happy, drank less alcohol than their higher-income peers, and reported an overall equal satisfaction level with their lives

According to Mr. Krieger, more prestigious jobs do not provide the three pillars of

self-determination theory, which include feelings of competence, autonomy, or connection to others, but public service jobs do.

John Hopkins study in 1990 found that lawyers were 3.6 times as likely as non-lawyers to suffer from depression

Yale Law School released a study that said 70% of students that responded to a survey were affected by mental health issues

Lawyers experience:

- o Increased suicide rates
- o Long hours, high demand, unhealthy degree of cynicism all add to mental
- o There is also public hostility that people hate lawyers, which affects their

There is now a program at George Washington University that helps law students make better decisions about what kind of law they want to practice and it will also help them with their mental health

o Similar course was implemented at the University of New Mexico Law health issues

mental health in their profession

School, Vanderbilt University, the University of Texas, and the University of Colorado