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**GOLDEN GOOSE AWARD: TAXPAYER-FUNDED RESEARCH TO SEE IF CHILDREN COULD RESIST MARSHMALLOWS HAS LED TO ADVANCES IN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR, BRAIN SCIENCE, EDUCATION, HEALTH**

**Creator of “Marshmallow Test” and Colleagues Will Receive Golden Goose Award at Library of Congress Ceremony on September 17**

Dr. Walter Mischel was once told he should seek funding for his “Marshmallow Test” from a candy manufacturer, not the National Institutes of Health (NIH). But NIH saw smart science in the 1960’s when Dr. Mischel proposed testing the ability of young children to resist the impulse to eat a single marshmallow when waiting would get them two treats instead of one.

Those initial Marshmallow Tests have led to extraordinary findings linking children’s self-control to later life outcomes and to methods for teaching self-control and improving lives. For their work over the past 50 years, which has been supported by NIH and the National Science Foundation, Dr. Mischel (who has done most of his work at Stanford and Columbia Universities), and two colleagues who began their work as graduate students, Dr. Philip Peake (now a long-time Smith College faculty member), and Dr. Yuichi Shoda (who is now at the University of Washington) have been selected to receive the [first Golden Goose Award of 2015](#).

“Who knew that marshmallows could lead to such important discoveries?” said Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN), who first proposed creating the Golden Goose Award. “Thanks to federal funding of this research, we know a lot more about how kids’ behavior affects their adult behavior. As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.”

“The ‘Marshmallow Test’ provides another concrete example of how small, seemingly inconsequential scientific studies can provide important insights into nature, medicine, and human behavior,” said Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA). “One of the greatest benefits we can achieve through scientific research is greater knowledge of what makes us act the way we do. Congratulations to Drs. Mischel, Peake, and Shoda on receiving the first Golden Goose Award of 2015.”

The Marshmallow Test is both fascinating and entertaining to watch. In the initial experiments, preschoolers joined Mischel, one at a time, in the “Surprise Room,” where he would give them a choice: “Get one little treat now, or two if you can wait for me to come back.”

Researchers did not film the initial experiments, but subsequent “marshmallow test” studies have been filmed, and millions of viewers have [watched them online](#). The methods used by children to distract themselves from the single treat in front of them include singing songs, playing with

their toes, turning their backs, or inventing elaborate imaginative scenarios and monologues. Some succeed, and some do not. All are fascinating to watch.

The importance of the research grew exponentially when the researchers decided a number of years later to check in on the original children to see how their lives were progressing. They found that those who had exhibited self-control were generally doing better – they had greater social and academic success and were better able to handle stress and pursue goals than those who had been unable to resist eating the single marshmallow.

In fact, over decades, the researchers have documented correlations between the ability to delay gratification and life outcomes as diverse as SAT scores, body-mass index, the frequency of drug abuse, and measurable differences in brain functioning, which are visible thanks to modern functional MRI techniques.

However, the researchers have also learned from their work that the ability to achieve self-control is not ingrained at the age of four. It can be taught, and it can be practiced and learned. Some educators, such as the KIPP schools, are using methods developed from the work of Drs. Mischel, Peake, and Shoda. And these methods can be used to teach positive life strategies from maintaining healthy habits to saving for retirement.

Additional Golden Goose Awards will be announced later in the year, and all of the awardees will receive their honors on September 17 at the fourth annual Golden Goose Awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. The event will take place in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress.

Rep. Cooper first had the idea for the Golden Goose Award when the late Senator William Proxmire (D-WI) was issuing the Golden Fleece Award to target wasteful federal spending and often targeted peer-reviewed science because it sounded odd. Rep. Cooper believed such an award was needed to counter the false impression that odd-sounding research was not useful.

In 2012, a coalition of business, university, and scientific organizations created the Golden Goose Award. Like the bipartisan group of Members of Congress who support the Golden Goose Award, the founding organizations believe that federally funded basic scientific research is the cornerstone of American innovation and essential to our economic growth, health, global competitiveness, and national security. Award recipients are selected by a panel of respected scientists and university research leaders.

Additional information about the Golden Goose Award, including previous winners and sponsors, can be found at [www.goldengooseaward.org](http://www.goldengooseaward.org) and on Twitter at [@GoldGooseAward](https://twitter.com/GoldGooseAward).

#### **Golden Goose Award Founding Organizations:**

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