

Ask A Genius 105 – The Headless Chicken and Reward (Part 1)¹
Scott Douglas Jacobsen & Rick Rosner
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[Beginning of recorded material]

Rick Rosner: Just to mention other forms of not quite consciousness. In the 1940s, I believe, there was—and I want to call him “Sam the Headless Chicken,” but I don’t think that’s what his name was. But there was a headless chicken that was popular for a few months. This guy was trying to chop off this chicken’s head for dinner, but he missed and only chopped off the top of the chicken’s head. Leaving almost none of its brain and just its lower beak.

The chicken still worked. The chicken walked around and did all sorts of chicken behavior. There was enough of a nub-brain that it could perform some basic chicken functions. He had to feed it with an eye dropper in the chicken hole. He travelled around showing people the headless chicken. Obviously, that chicken has very little conscious processing, but the chicken still worked using the remaining processing that wasn’t centralized.

Scott Jacobsen: If you had the 100-node processor, and if you had the 85 nodes for administrative stuff, the 5 for relaying, and the 10 for conscious manipulation of information, it would be as if you cut off the 5 and the 10.

R: Yea, something like that. That is kinda a horror theme. I mean, zombies—there’s some kinda possibly deep fear of losing the executive function, the conscious operator. Losing our identity, but still walking around.

S: People have prepared meals while they sleep walk. People do all sorts of things while they sleepwalk. Automated behaviors, they will then wake up without any memory of it, and they’ll have a freshly made meal ready to go. [Laughing]

R: Yea. [Laughing] People find that—People like to say that we’re hardwired to be afraid of snakes. I think there’s some deep disquiet about—I doubt it’s a hardwired thing—but, if you were going to make a list of things that make for good horror movies, loss of executive function

¹ Four format points for the session article:

1. Bold text following and including “Scott Jacobsen:” or “S:” is Scott & non-bold text following and including “Rick Rosner:” or “R:” is Rick.
2. Session article conducted, transcribed, edited, formatted, and published by Scott.
3. Footnotes & in-text citations in the interview & references after the interview.
4. This session article has been edited for clarity and readability.

For further information on the formatting guidelines incorporated into this document, please see the following documents:

1. American Psychological Association. (2010). Citation Guide: APA. Retrieved from <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/system/files/28281/APA6CitationGuideSFUv3.pdf>.
2. Humble, A. (n.d.). Guide to Transcribing. Retrieved from <http://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/Transcription%20Guide.pdf>.

is one of them. *Stepford Wives*, they're still walking around, but have been hollowed out. There's no there there. Anyway, you can probably make lists of dozens of horror movies that scare you by showing people taken: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

S: We have real life cases of this by way. *En masse*, apparently, we have good research on the impacts of certain technologies on executive function. Executive function is an emergent property as a characteristic of people based on the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. There's another part of their brain called the nucleus accumbens. The nucleus accumbens is part of the reward center.

So, typically, if you have a real-life task or goal that you want to achieve and you struggle for, you have a context surrounding it and a narrative leading up to it, and then when you achieve that goal—you get a 1585 on the SAT, you get a high score on a test, you climb Mount Everest, you ace a dance recital, and so on—then you have a very strong reward, but it is based within context.

The issue is for education across most or all developed nations that are using technologies for certain things, such as pornography and video games, to excess that the typical—they checked in blood flows too—the blood flows that go from the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—that is for self-control, morality, saying the right thing rather than the impulsive thing, conscientiousness—these behaviors come from the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the blood flows there when you're engaging in these activities.

But when you're engaging in excess pornography and video games...

R: You're over-rewarded.

S: ...it drains from the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the term is “engorges” the nucleus accumbens. The problem: you get reward without real-life context. So people lose a lot of track of time. People have issues with this new form of addiction called arousal addictions, where you want more of different rather than more of the same with traditional drugs such as cocaine. So people, in a way, if they're losing their executive function through these things, are enacting in such a way, not completely but to a degree, like these hypothetical zombies and Frankenstein, and all of those things.

R: You're making a bunch of babies because you're making them over-rewarded and too easily rewarded. It sounds like *Idiocracy*.

S: It's got electrolytes.

R: [Laughing] Brawndo.

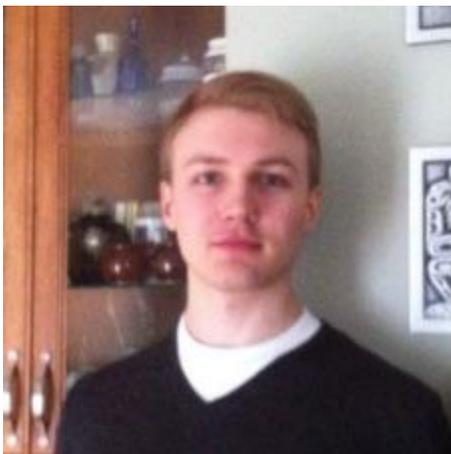
[Laughing]

[End of recorded material]

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