

A Feeling of Control: How America Can Finally Learn to Deal With Its Impulses

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The children's television show *Sesame Street* has always had a way of reflecting the zeitgeist in shades of Muppet fur. Consider, for instance, the evolution of Cookie Monster. For his first few decades on air, he was a simple character: blue, ravenous, cookie-fixated; a lovably unleashed id. A 1990 White House report dubbed him "the quintessential consumer." But in the mid-2000s, as concern mounted over childhood obesity, Cookie Monster's tastes became a problem. So he went from devouring cookies to guzzling bowls of fruit. Then, last year, he changed yet again, as the show's curriculum designers saw in his voracious appetite a different kind of teaching opportunity.

For the show's 44th season on the air, Cookie Monster was essentially repurposed into a full-time, walking, talking, googly-eyed vehicle for a set of intensely fashionable ideas about psychology and success. The blue Muppet was now, as an official *Sesame Street* website put it, a "poster child for someone needing to master self-regulation skills."

For the duration of the new season, Cookie lusted after his favorite treat as much as ever. But when it came to acting on his desires, he sang, quite literally, a different tune: "Me want it, but me wait." In sketch after sketch, song after song, he struggled mightily with self-control, strained to keep his focus on long-term goals, and collected mental strategies to delay gratification.

Read the whole story: [*Pacific Standard*](#)