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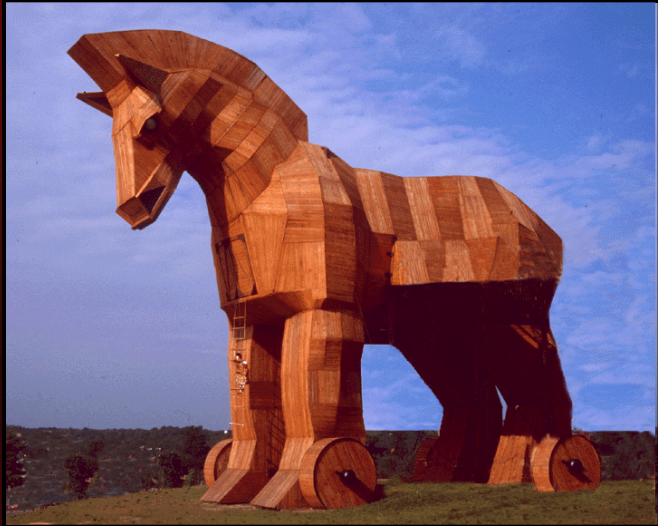
What the hell was I thinking?

Understanding the precursors to real-life regret

Andy Towers, Ross Flett, & Stephen Hill
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A History of Regret

Regret is **VERY** common

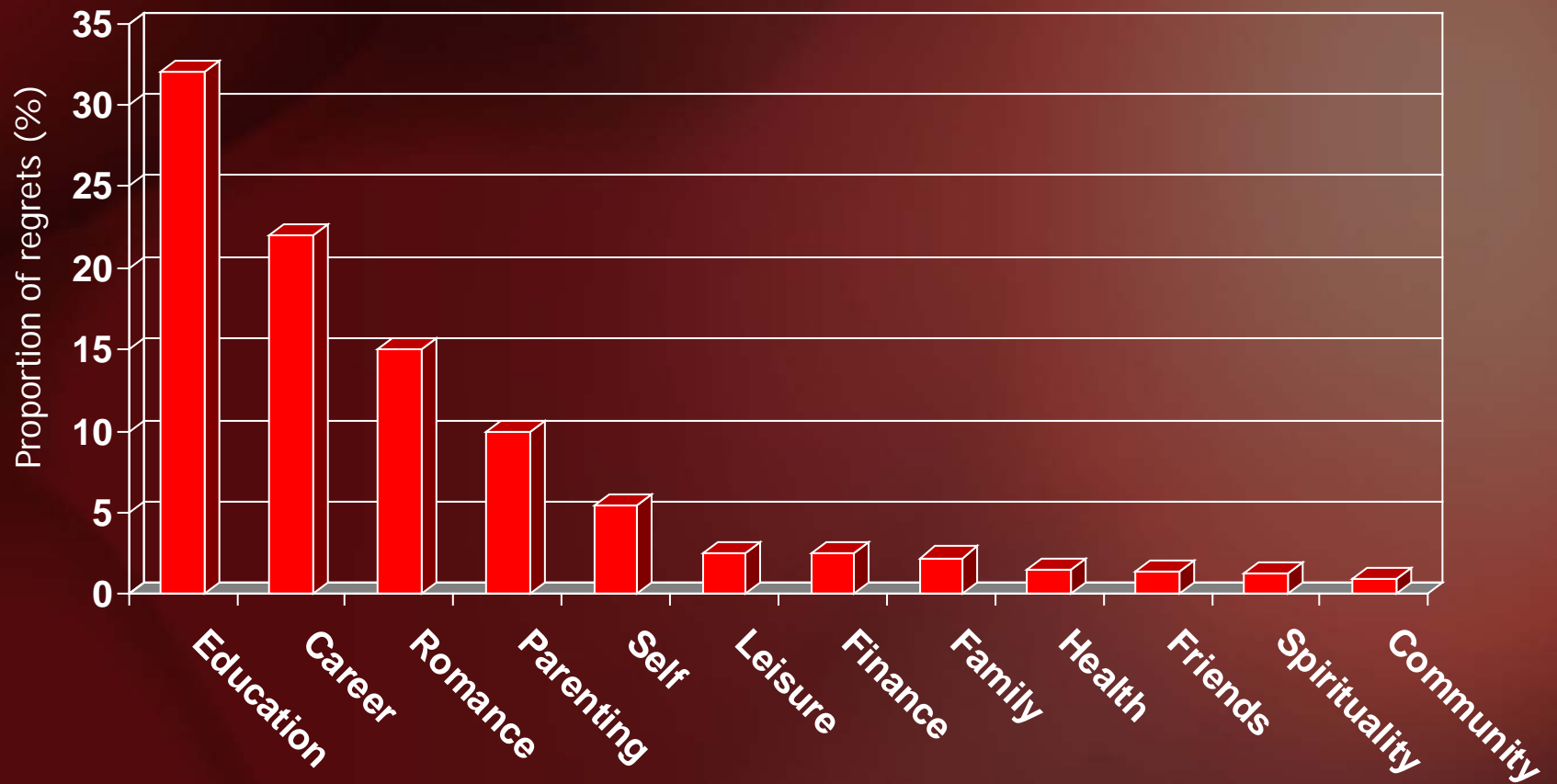


What signals regret?

- Turned out worse than it could have
- We were responsible for the decision
- Involved something we care about

What do we regret?

Educational choices are our greatest regret*



Past theories of regret

Differences in Life Domains

- High opportunity to change (e.g., education) = high regret
- Low opportunity to change (e.g., family) = low regret

Temporal Pattern to Life Regret

- Short-term: We regret actions more than inactions
- Long-term: We regret inactions more than actions

But...

- Where is the humanity?
- Where is the intensity?

Pathway to a new theory

Everyday decision-making

- Implicit - Fast and requires little cognitive effort (e.g., heuristics)
- Explicit - Slow and requires a lot of cognitive effort (e.g., analysis)

A dual processes approach

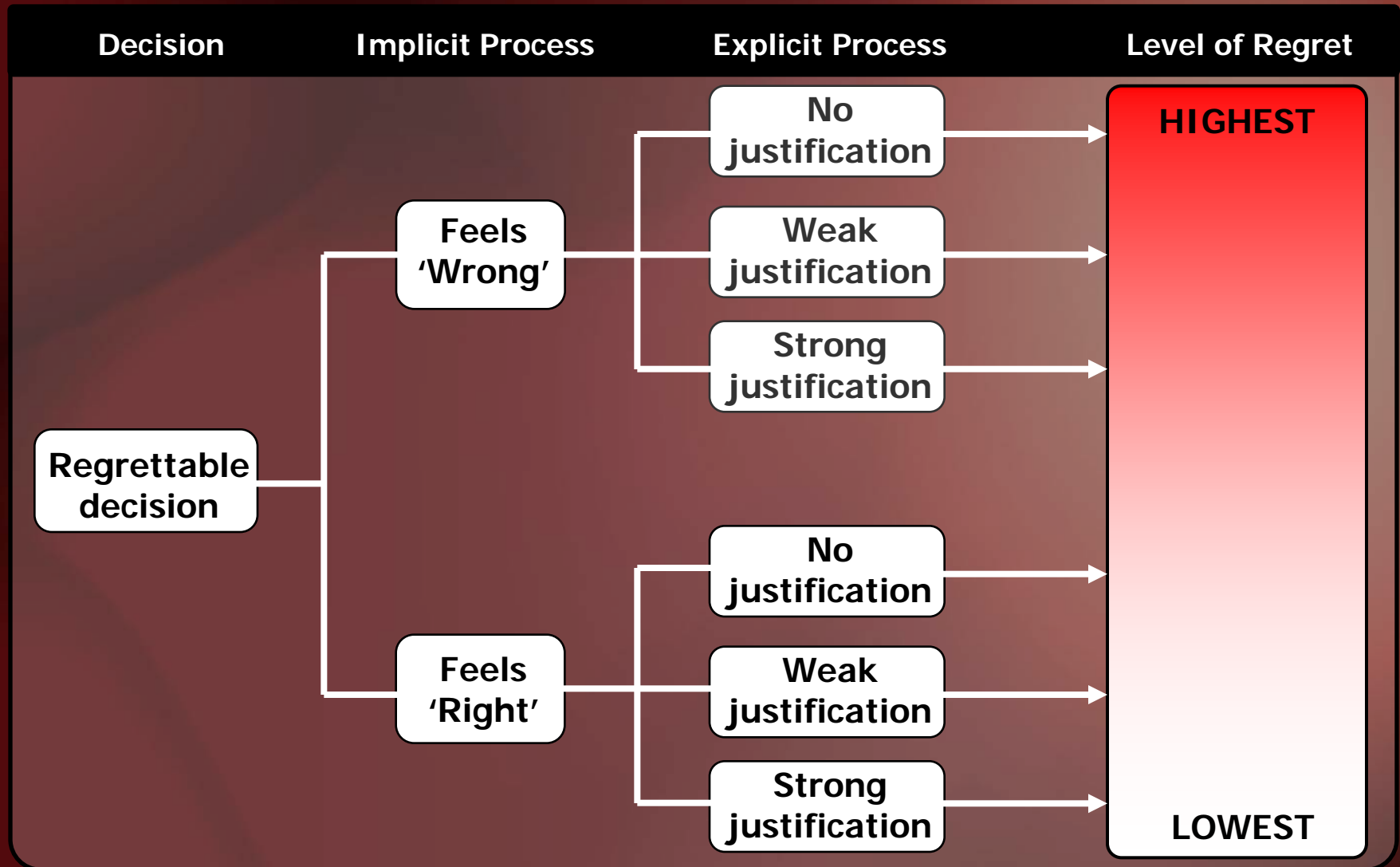
1. Implicit orientation

- Semi-hard-wired responses (e.g., driving)
- Based on situational consistency

2. Justification

- Recognised as important
- Underdeveloped – what about levels of justification? Basis?

The Dual Process Theory of Regret



Participants

- 653 respondents (23% response rate)
- Aged 18-87 (mean = 48)
- Mainly NZ European (82%)
- Broad range of educational levels & work status

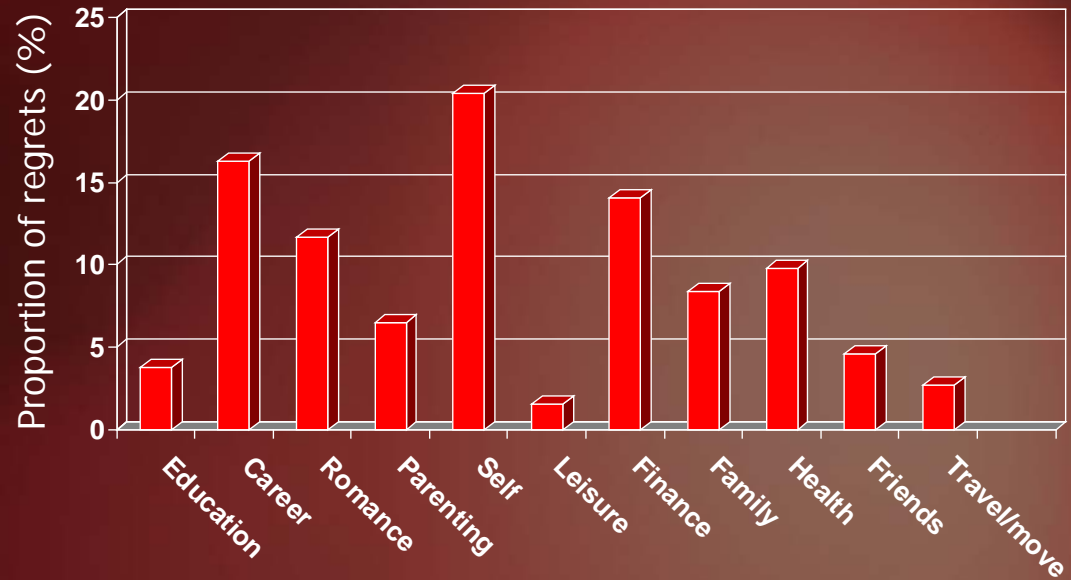
Postal Survey

- Greatest single short and long-term regret
- Regret intensity
- Whether regret contradicted personal life rules (i.e., self-consistency)
- How the decision was justified (i.e., strong, weak or none)

Results: Life domain

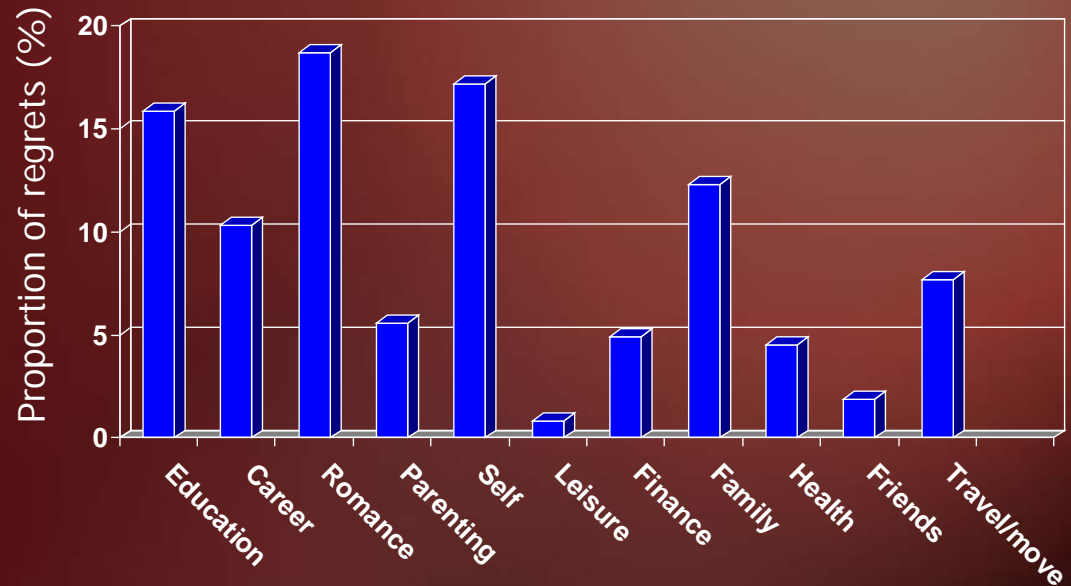
Short-term regrets

- No difference in intensity



Long-term regrets

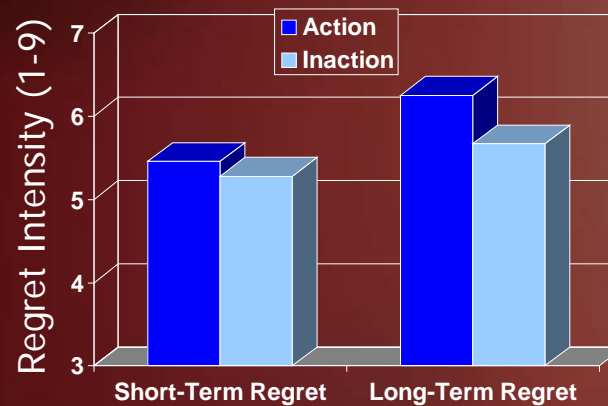
- No difference in intensity



Results: Action vs. inaction

Intensity

- Actions more intense in long-term

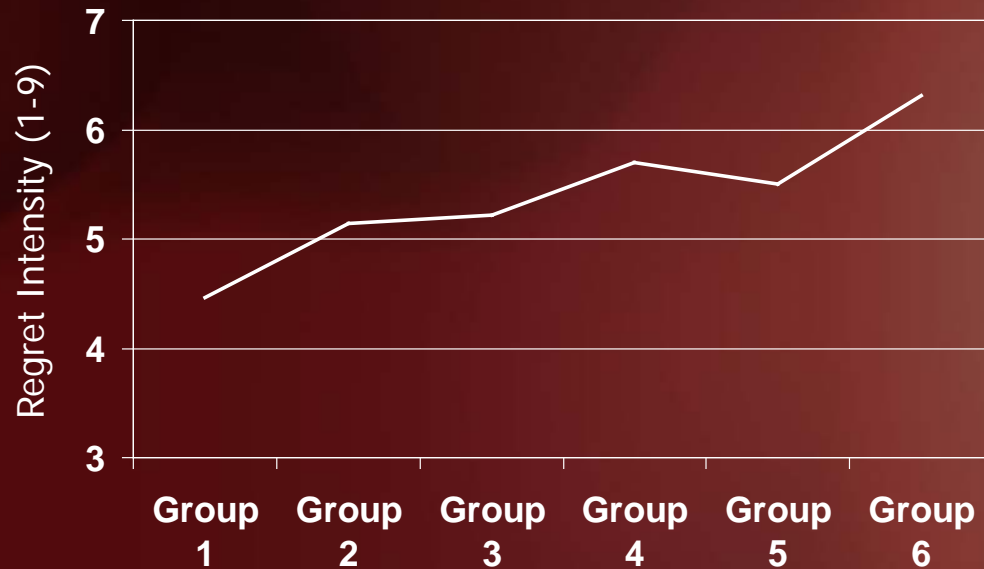


Conclusion:

- Theory of Life Domains does not work
- The Temporal Theory of Regret does not work

DPTR: Short-term regrets

Regret across DPTR groups

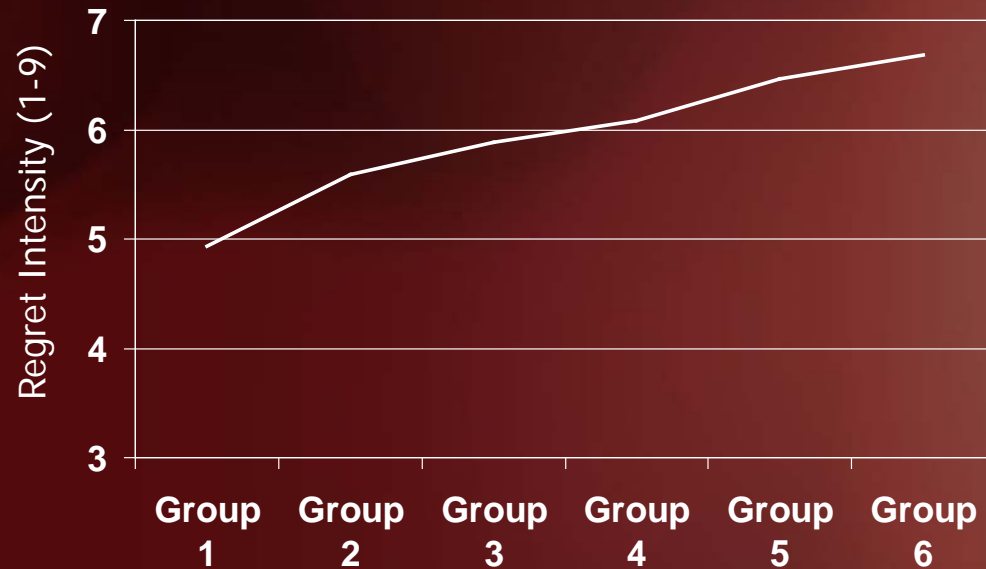


What influences short-term regret intensity?

- Implicit Orientation (unconscious feeling)
- Decision Justification (conscious thought)

DPTR: Long-term regrets

Regret across DPTR groups



What influences long-term regret intensity?

- ✓ Implicit Orientation (unconscious feeling)
- ✓ Decision Justification (conscious thought)

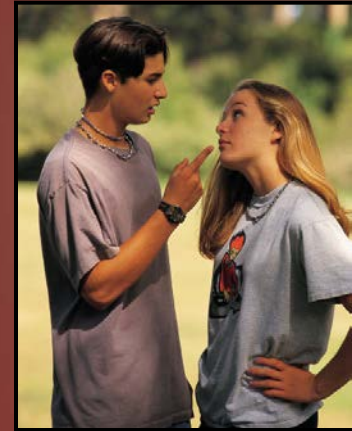
What influences the intensity of regret?

Previous theories

- Do not work

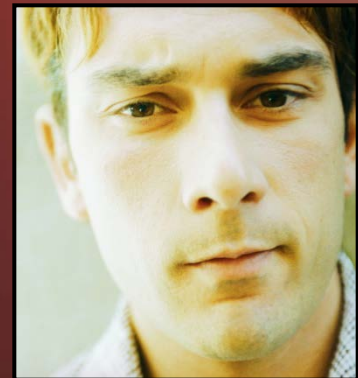
An explicit justification

- Only influences long-term regret intensity



Our feelings of right and wrong

- Central to short and long-term regret
- If it feels wrong then don't do it!



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Understanding the precursors to real-life regret.

Towers AJ

2009
