

When pride in achievement leads to a large order of fries

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You aced that test; now it's time for a treat. Sometimes pride in an achievement can lead people to indulge in unhealthy choices, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Across four studies in the food consumptions and spending domains, we show that pride is associated with two opposing forces; it promotes a sense of [achievement](#), which increases indulgence, and it promotes self-awareness, which facilitates [self control](#)," write authors Keith Wilcox (Babson College), Thomas Kramer (University of South Carolina), and Sankar Sen (Baruch College).

The authors set out to examine the effect of pride on consumer self-control decisions, and discovered that pride has different varieties. One variant—pride in a sense of achievement—leads to people wanting to reward themselves with indulgences. Another kind of pride features increased self-awareness; this type of pride leads to less indulgence.

In their first study, the researchers asked students to write about a proud moment and then make a [choice](#) that involved self-control. Participants were able to choose between two gift certificates: a less-indulgent one that could be used for school supplies or one that could be used for entertainment. "As we predicted, when the sense of achievement factored more heavily into the decision, students that wrote about a proud moment were more likely to select the entertainment gift certificate," the authors write.

In subsequent studies, the authors found that [consumers](#) who experienced pride in a sense of achievement were more likely to choose French fries over a salad with their lunch entrée. The authors also found that happiness, another positive emotion, did not have the same effect on consumer choice as [pride](#).

"Because a number of key societal issues, such as the credit and obesity crises, have been attributed to poor self-control in money and health decisions, this research has important implications for improving consumer welfare," the authors conclude.

More information: Keith Wilcox, Thomas Kramer, and Sankar Sen. "Indulgence or Self-Control: A Dual Process Model of the Effect of Incidental Pride on Indulgent Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2011 (published online November 5, 2010). Further information: ejcr.org

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