

Pride can keep you on track or send you off the rails

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Anthony Salerno is an assistant professor of marketing at the University of Cincinnati. Credit: Joseph Fuqua II

Can pride in a personal achievement also help you turn down the dessert tray, or can it make you want to indulge as a reward? It all depends,

according to new research published in the October issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

The study led by the University of Cincinnati found that when people took pride in an accomplishment and chalked that up to being disciplined and responsible, they were more likely to continue making disciplined choices through the day. But when people considered a self-control goal that they had before feeling proud - a goal such as eating healthy, working out or saving money - they were more likely to think they had made good progress toward their goal, and therefore were more likely to indulge in a reward that veered from making disciplined choices. The findings could hold possibilities ranging from investigating the nation's obesity epidemic to examining Americans' growing [credit card debt](#).

Researchers on the study are Anthony Salerno, a University of Cincinnati assistant professor of marketing, Carl H. Lindner College of Business, Juliano Laran, a professor of marketing for the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, and Chris Janiszewski, the Russell Berrie Eminent Scholar Chair and professor of marketing, Warrington College of Business Administration, University of Florida, Gainesville.

The journal article, "Pride and Regulatory Behavior: The Influence of Appraisal Information and Self-Regulatory Goals" summarizes four studies in which half of the participants thought about a self-control goal and half did not, so those participants were studied in a so-called neutral condition.

In the first study involving 182 undergraduates, participants in the active, self-regulatory goal condition were shown words associated with being regulated, such as "health, willpower, persistence and virtue." The second, neutral group was shown words such as "flower, refrigerator, notebook and picture."

In a second study involving 312 undergraduates, the neutral participants were asked to write about a typical day. The pride-related participants were told that the purpose of the writing task was to reveal life events that made them feel proud.

The third exercise, involving 312 undergraduates, involved a self-control dilemma that allowed participants to be either disciplined or indulgent, such as choosing between a granola bar or some cookies - sleeping in or getting up early.

The fourth study, involving 257 [undergraduates](#), examined how pride influences people's budgeting habits.

"We found that when people did not have a self-control goal and were made to feel proud, they increased their level of self-control, becoming more likely to choose healthy snacks or to save money," says Salerno. "However, when people had a self-control goal and were made to feel proud, they had less [self-control](#), becoming more likely to select the indulgent snacks or to spend their money, because they thought of themselves as having already achieved their goal.

"It's almost like this misattribution," continues Salerno. "You have this goal, you're made to feel proud - which is a sense of accomplishment - so they feel it gives them license to indulge. It's one of those issues that depending on what we're thinking about, we tend to get different effects."

Salerno says that when the research is applied to marketing or advertising, the successful sell would involve first focusing on an emotion or goal, which could result in a fast-food run or a trip to the supplement store. He adds that the findings could possibly be applied toward examining the obesity crisis in the United States as well as overspending amid shrinking savings accounts.

"The basic finding is that, for the most part, when people are made to feel proud, they're more likely to exercise restraint, such as choosing a salad or intending to save more than to spend," Salerno says. "But if people first think about a healthy eating or savings [goal](#) and are proud of what they've accomplished so far, their behavior starts to become more hedonic. So it all depends on what pride focuses us to think about. When pride focuses us on who we are, we seem to become more restrained. When pride focuses us on what we've done, there's more of a license to indulge."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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