

Strategic indulgence key to maximizing the college experience

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Want to maximize the college experience? It's not just about grades. High performing students, as measured by their grade point average (GPA), are also good at making decisions so that they can enjoy college game days without hurting their academic performance. These students make good strategic decisions in their time use, according to new research recently published in the journal *Social Psychological and*

Personality Science.

Previous research on academic achievement has focused on avoiding temptations to maximize performance results. In the context of [college sports](#), in particular, it has been shown that spending [time](#) on [game](#)-related activities is related to poor learning outcomes. Yet engaging in non-academic activities, including social gatherings around college sports, can build social identity as well as improve self esteem and psychological well-being.

This study shows that "instead of avoiding temptations like a plague, students can make plans to enjoy them without compromising the overall long-term goal pursuit," says Lile Jia, a social psychologist at the National University of Singapore.

The key to balance, suggests Jia, is being selective about when to indulge, and making plans to compensate for the indulgence.

In their research, Jia and colleagues compared the decision-making process of high GPA students and low GPA students leading up to, during, and after a college basketball game day. In a series of three studies, they compared anywhere from 216 to 530 high and low GPA students.

The experiences represented in the studies included watching the game on television, meeting up with friends or actually attending a game.

The high GPA students in the studies made choices to balance their study time around game days and social activities, while low GPA students did not demonstrate such strategic balancing. While making a "strategic indulgence" choice, the high GPA students reported more enjoyment when they engaged in game-related activities, as they planned other times to study and stayed focused on their long-term academic

goals.

Can people who are not great at making these "strategic indulgence" choices learn these habits?

"It's possible," says Jia. He says more studies are needed to see how others can get better at engaging in non-academic activities such as college sports in a "smart" way and be better decision makers in long term goal pursuits.

More information: Lile Jia et al, How to Have Your Cake and Eat It Too, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550618789403](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618789403)

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