

You *like* what you eat: Comfort food as a social surrogate

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Introduction

Comfort food and the need to belong

Previous research has shown comfort food can act as a social surrogate, or non-human social target that serves as a reminder of others. As such, they can mimic the effects of close relationships.

Attachment as a moderator

Attachment styles characterize people's relationship with others. Those with positive relationship associations are considered to have a secure attachment style, whereas those with negative relationship associations are considered to have an insecure attachment style.

Present Study

In the current research, I hypothesized that, if comfort food serves as a reminder of close others, those who are securely attached, should evaluate a comfort food more positively after a social threat.

Method

Participants entered the lab and completed an attachment scale.

Next, participants wrote about a time they fought with a close other, or listed items in their residence.

All participants then consumed a small amount of potato chips then indicated how *good* and *delicious* they were, as well as how much they *enjoyed* them on a scale from 1 (*not much at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Participants then indicated their mood (e.g., *excited, interested*) on a scale from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*), then were fully debriefed.



2 x 2 Design

- IV: Social threat essay vs. control
- IV: Secure attachment vs. insecure attachment
- DV: Food evaluation

Results

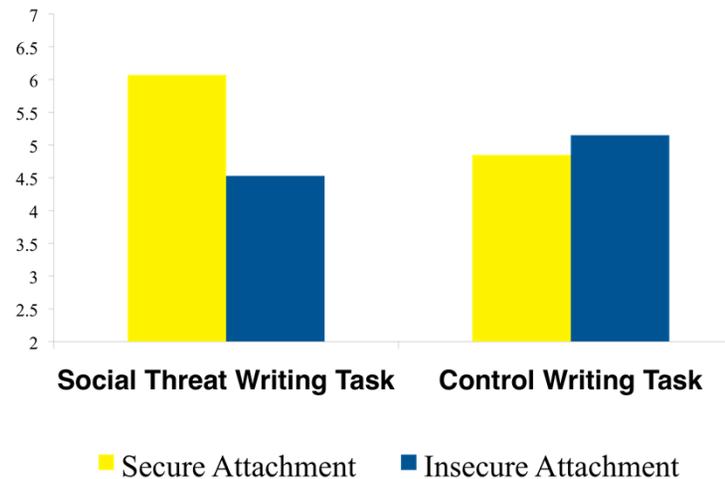
-The overall 2×2 ANOVA produced the predicted interaction, $F(1, 73) = 8.86, p < .01$, such that attachment style moderated the evaluations of the potato chips after a social threat.

-Simple effects tests revealed that attachment style moderated the evaluations of the potato chips in the social threat writing task condition, $t(32) = -3.66, p < .01$.

-However, attachment style did not moderate the evaluations of the potato chips in the control writing task condition, $t(32) = .68, p = .50$.

-A 2×2 ANCOVA with mood as a covariate indicated that the effects were not due to mood. The overall interaction remained significant, $F(1, 72) = 10.12, p < .01$.

Food Evaluations



Conclusions

The current research found that people who are securely attached (but not insecurely attached) evaluate a comfort food more positively after a social threat.

Implications for eating behaviors:

Previous research shows that people attempt to cope with negative affect by eating. Comfort food, as a class of food that can alleviate loneliness, might be targets of overconsumption during times of emotional distress.

Implications for consumer branding:

Because brands are often evaluated as relational "partners," it is possible that comfort food may be perceived similarly and purchased accordingly.

Literature cited

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