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 × 2 Design
-IV1: Social threat essay vs. control
-IV2: 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, δ(32) = -3.66, p < .01.

- However, attachment style did not moderate the evaluations of the potato chips in the control writing task condition, δ(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.

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.

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Literature cited
