

# FOCUS

Summer 2010

## AVOIDING TEMPTATION

**Congratulations  
to the graduating  
Class of 2010 !!**

**Best wishes  
for a happy  
and fulfilling  
future !!**

Adding a bit of drama to your inner dialogue may help you stick to your exercise routine or take a pass on that second helping. That's the lesson from a new study from the McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin. It reveals how some people are able to look temptation in the eye...and then say no.

To investigate how consumers (in this case, college students) respond to temptations that are in conflict with their personal goals, the researchers created four different scenarios—three involving tempting foods and the other an invitation to a Friday night party that might make it challenging to wake up early for Saturday morning classes or studying.



**...overstate the  
consequences of giving  
in....**

high grade point averages told themselves that the Friday night party would run extremely late, while the students with lower grades rationalized that it would end reasonably early. Ying Zhang, PhD, lead study author and assistant professor of marketing, states that this study demonstrates an excellent tool for buttressing self-control—one you can use

anywhere, anytime, whether to go to bed earlier, save money, eat more healthfully, exercise longer or for any other goal. The idea is to make the potential consequences of the temptation so bad, he says, that giving in to it becomes completely out of the question. The more accessible

the temptation, the stronger the threat you should attach to it, instructs Dr. Zhang. "If you are faced with an impul-

sive purchase, exaggerate what a dent it will make in your retirement savings or the money that you need for your big vacation," he suggests. "This will make you much less likely to buy it because you are now thinking 'this would be so bad I definitely must not do it!'" According to Dr. Zhang, your first attempts to do this may be self-conscious. You'll have to remind yourself to overstate the consequences of giving in, but in time this behavior can become automatic. If you consistently exaggerate threats to your goals, he says, you'll build this tactic into "an automatic reflex tool for long-term self-control." And the consequences of that will be terrific!

Source(s): Ying Zhang, PhD, assistant professor of marketing, University of Texas at Austin, McCombs School of Business, Austin.

### FRIGHTFUL CONSEQUENCES

To test the mechanism of self-control, the researcher manipulated the situations in a variety of ways to make temptations more or less accessible. They discovered that the study participants who were most committed to, in this case, their healthy bodies or their grades, countered temptation by substantially exaggerating the threat it carried. That is to say, in their minds, they embellished the temptation with all sorts of vile, horrific, and hair-raising characteristics, making it easier to just say "no." For example, when faced with access to a 100 calorie cookie, women who described themselves a diet conscious estimated that it had as many as 800 calories. In the party-invitation group, the students who already had

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## FOCUS

# ELEVATION AND PRAYER

A new study about prayer tells us a good deal about the nature of happiness. Brandon Whittington's thesis research is on the topic of types of prayer and their effect on emotions. It turns out that not only are there distinct forms of prayer, Whittington's findings tell us something about how to nurture and develop the very best in ourselves.

What are the types of prayer?

- *Adoration* are prayers that focus on the worship of God, without any reference to the needs, the desires, or the circumstances of the person praying. If you have read the book of Psalms in the bible, you are familiar with that mode of prayer.
- *Thanksgiving* prayers focus on praise for blessings in one's life. There is a recounting of those things that one feels are blessings, reminding us of Meister Eckhart's "If the only prayer you said in life was 'thank you,' that would suffice."
- *Supplication* prayers asks God to intervene in one's life or in the life of someone else. The "foxhole" prayers characterize this, essentially asking God to "get me out of this jam I am in, and I will live a better life."
- *Confession* prayers admit sins and failings to God. These prayers involve the admission of negative behaviors, and a request

for forgiveness.

- *Reception* prayers are requests in which one more passively awaits divine wisdom, understanding, or guidance.
- *Obligatory* prayers are fixed prayers repeated at set worship times, such as Muslims praying five times a day, or "Hail Mary" types of prayers which are set and memorized.

Whittington then measured *satisfaction with life, self esteem, optimism and meaning of life* and correlated them with how often 175 men and 252 women used those six types of prayer. So do some types of prayer produce more elevation feelings than others? Yes, it turns out that they clearly do. *Thanksgiving* is associated with better scores on satisfaction with life, self esteem, and optimism. *Reception* prayers are associated with greater self esteem and meaning of life. *Adoration* prayers are associated with greater sense of meaning of life. However, the other three forms of prayer are not associated with better emotional states. *Obligation* and *confession* prayers actually seem to go along with lower optimism. While the correlation coefficients are not terribly high, they do tell us that there is a relationship. But, let's not jump to conclusions. Remember, correlation doesn't imply causation. If you are praying confession prayers, you may have messed up in your life, so of course, your self esteem and optimism may not be as high.



**Some forms of prayer produce more elevation feelings than others.**

That could suggest that while this type of prayer is probably justified, it also is associated with more negative feelings... What might be taken from this is that gratitude and awe and humility are good emotions to cultivate, and when one prays with thanksgiving, reception, and adoration, those positive emotions are exercised. Feelings are muscles. If you exercise happiness, you are stronger in it. This study doesn't prove that but it does support it. And whether you pray or not, what you exercise in your mind does come back to you.

To download the entire study, go to :  
[http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/247667\\_918293943.pdf](http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/247667_918293943.pdf)

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...whether you  
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# ONE-WORD SECRET TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE

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Couples who talk about their lives, likes and dislikes using the word “we”— as in “we love Thai food”— can seem annoying to a lot of people. The usual equation, after all, is two people equals two opinions, this being America and all. But if you are among the folks who find “we” talk irritating in couples, you may want to rethink your stance. According to a new study, the ones who say “we” and “our” are better able to resolve their differences than those who tend to say “I” and “my.”

## ARE WE HAPPY?

This study, done at the University of California, Berkley, build upon earlier research showing that plural pronoun use is a strong indicator of satisfaction in a new marriage. This time researchers sought to learn..

- Whether the sense of partnership implied by saying “we” contributes to the emotions couples experience while interacting with each other....
- Whether using plural pronouns affected the couples’ physiological meas-

urements of stress of their behavior....

- Whether there were any age-related differences in use of these pronouns.

There were two groups — couples were either between 40 and 50 years old and married at least 15 years...or between age 50 and 60, married 35+ years. Each couple spent 15 minutes discussing a topic they’d previously identified as being an area of conflict while sensors monitored their skin temperature, pulse, heart rate and physical motions. Transcripts of their conversations were then analyzed by computer to count “we-ness” pronouns versus “separateness” pronouns.

*So what did we learn?* Use of we words did, in fact, correlate positively with other aspect of how affectionately the partners behaved toward each other and also with lower levels of physiological stress. Also, the older couples were more likely to speak in the “we” voice than the middle-aged ones and, interestingly, in that group the use of singular pronouns was especially indicative of an un-

happy marriage.

## HOW THIS CAN HELP YOU...

Using lots of singular words during conflict may have a detrimental effect on a relationship, study author Benjamin Seider, a graduate student in psychology, speculates that use of these words places the spouses in an adversarial position, whereas use of togetherness words “seemed to help couples regulate their interactions better.” Seider believes that when you find yourself using words like “I” and “you” during a heated conversation, it may be a sign that you’re feeling increasingly negative—he suggest pulling back, perhaps taking a time out to get calm. Consciously sticking to plural pronouns, on the other hand, makes resolution easier. According to Seider, “The ‘we’ words really were an antidote to help realign the couple and put them back on the same team.” This is advice from which we can all benefit!

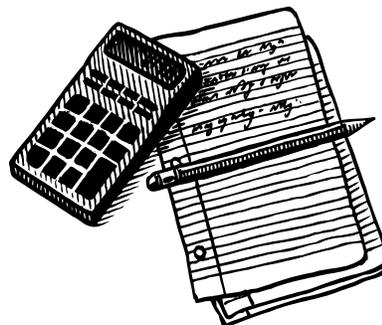
Source(s): Benjamin Seider, graduate student, department of psychology, University of California, Berkely.

*Using lots of singular words during conflict may have a detrimental effect on a relationship.*

# CHORES MATTER MORE THAN HOMEWORK

Chores matter more than homework for making good students. Kids who do real, meaningful work around the house—without reminders and without pay—learn self-control...the benefits of structure and limits... and the importance of being needed. Kids who regularly do chores feel proud of themselves and their accomplishments, and homework and schoolwork seem easier to them. Take advantage of the summer months to get kids started on a routine of having chores.

Charles Fay, PhD, author, consultant, and therapist, Love and Logic Institute, Golden, Colorado, writing in Love & Logic Journal [www.LoveAndLogic.com](http://www.LoveAndLogic.com)



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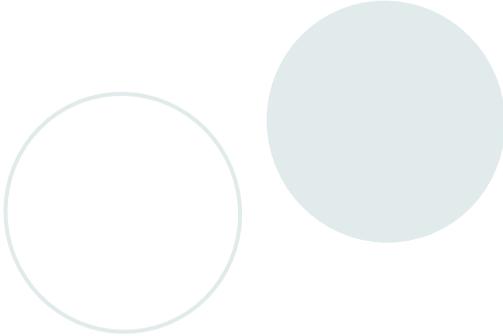
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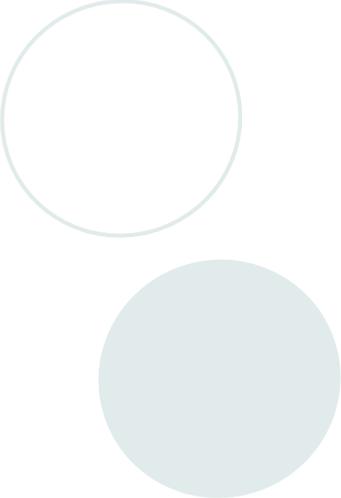
## Welcome to Vista!

Our FOCUS is on you by providing the very best  
in psychological and counseling services.

Established in 2008, our clinicians hold over 65 years  
of combined experience.

We are committed to helping you have  
greater emotional wellness and adjustment by offering  
individual, child and adolescent, couples, family,  
and group therapy.

We are available to you Monday thru Saturday  
with day and evening hours for your convenience.



## CHILDREN OF ADULTS WITH ANXIETY

Children of adults with anxiety disorders are more likely to develop anxiety themselves. Anxiety affects up to one-fifth of children in the United States but often is not recognized—and delays in diagnosis and treatment can lead to depression and substance abuse. A recent study suggest weekly family sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy may prevent children from developing the same problems with anxiety that their parents struggle with. Parents should seek help if they notice early signs of anxiety in children, such as physical complaints with no medical cause, avoidance of daily activities and too much worry.

Golda Ginsberg, PhD, child psychologist, John Hopkins Children's Center, Baltimore, and leader of a study of 40 children, published in *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*



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