

The Light Side of Temptation: Effects of Visuo-Spatial Cues on Consumption of Hedonic Foods

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In this talk, I discuss two research projects that focus on how people process perceptual cues related to color and spatial architecture of foods. In the first project, I will present evidence showing that the lightness of color of a hedonic food serves as a cue about its taste and healthiness, causing the food to be enveloped in a positive halo, thereby increasing consumption related to darker colored foods. I will show that the effect is due to well-learned associations between light and good (and between dark and bad), that help mitigate any guilt of consumption of light colored hedonic foods and enhance taste perceptions. In the second project, I examine a well-known and robust phenomenon called the portion size effect, whereby people tend to consume more of larger servings of food because of perceived appropriateness of the serving size. Using a mixed hedonic food (featuring both hedonic and healthy elements), I show that the location of a healthy garnish on a serving of an indulgence can influence consumption and potentially mitigate the portion size effect. Specifically, I show that healthy garnishes placed on top of an indulgence lead to reduced consumption relative to those placed to the side. The effects are driven by attentional processes.