

who was his wife—tasted the beers and answered the short questionnaire. Then Rich tried again. He told me that he had recently read one of my papers and liked it a lot. It was a good paper, and I liked it, too, but I think he was just trying to make me feel better about my job as a beer server.

ANOTHER STUDY, CONDUCTED later at Duke with wine samples and MBA students, allowed us to measure some of the participants' personality traits—something the manager of the Carolina Brewery had not been thrilled about. That opened the door for us to find out what might be contributing to this interesting phenomenon. What we found was a correlation between the tendency to order alcoholic beverages that were different from what other people at the table had chosen and a personality trait called “need for uniqueness.” In essence, individuals more concerned with portraying their own uniqueness were more likely to select an alcoholic beverage not yet ordered at their table in an effort to demonstrate that they were in fact one of a kind.

What these results show is that people are sometimes willing to sacrifice the pleasure they get from a particular consumption experience in order to project a certain image to others. When people order food and drinks, they seem to have two goals: to order what they will enjoy most and to portray themselves in a positive light in the eyes of their friends. The problem is that once they order, say, the food, they may be stuck with a dish they don't like—a situation they often regret. In essence, people, particularly those with a high need for uniqueness, may sacrifice personal utility in order to gain reputational utility.

Although these results were clear, we suspected that in other cultures—where the need for uniqueness is not