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Costly Curves? Overweight Consumers Spend More When Reminded of Thinness

Popular media mirror Western culture's fixation with being thin. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), even subtle reminders of idealized bodies can encourage overweight consumers to overspend.



“In our research, we show that exposure to body cues (i.e., shapes) can have unintended consequences on seemingly unrelated behavior, such as spending,” write authors Marisabel Romero (Colorado State University) and Adam W. Craig (University of Kentucky). “We demonstrate that seeing a thin (vs. wide) human-like shape leads high-body-mass-index consumers to make more indulgent spending decisions.”

The authors found that mere reminders of the thin-body ideal can cause overweight consumers to feel worse about their own abilities, including less capable of managing their spending impulses.

In one study where consumers were shown an object with a thin, human-like shape (much like a Coca-Cola bottle), high-BMI consumers were more likely to buy a higher-priced, Fiji-brand bottle of water than a lower-priced, generic-brand bottle. Another study on shopping found that high-BMI consumers were more willing to take on credit card debt after seeing a thin (vs. wide) shape because they felt less capable of managing their spending impulses.

These findings suggest that consumer advocates should be wary of reinforcing the link between weight, self-control, and financial achievement, as doing so can be counterproductive. The implications are particularly important given the negative consequences such messages could have on consumer debt and spending.

“Our studies confirm that body shapes are powerful cues that can influence consumer spending preferences,” the authors conclude. “Marketers have long used slender models, forms, and designs to promote economic and social benefits. However, their design decisions might lead overweight consumers, who lack identification with idealized standards, to make more indulgent spending decisions.”

Marisabel Romero and Adam W. Craig. “[Costly Curves: How Human-like Shapes Can Increase Spending](#).” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2017. DOI: [10.1093/jcr/ucw080](#)



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