



Self-Control, Integrity, and Status: Inference from Body Size



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INTRODUCTION

All fat is the Lord's.

—Leviticus 3:16–17

- Body size is an excellent context for understanding the social and moral boundaries of society (e.g., Richins, 1991; Gurari, Hetts, & Strube, 2006; Wan, Ansons, Chattopadhyay, & Leboe, 2013; Sobol & Darke, 2014)

Research question: Could perception of an individual's body type elicit the perceptions of social status? Why a thin individual is perceived to have high status in the eyes of others?

❖ Self – control

- The mind/body dualism appoints a higher status to the mind than to the body, this puts pressure on people to “normalize and control” their bodies. A thin body signals the ability to exercise self-discipline, will power, and self-control (Glassner, 1990; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995)
- To become skillful and effective at any task a person must devote time and effort, exercising will power to stay focused and delaying the gratification. Therefore, thinness should lead to an inference of greater self-control.

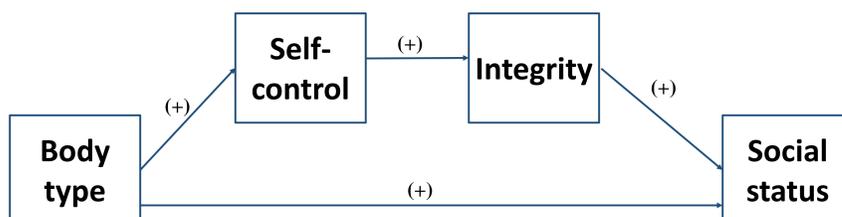
❖ Integrity

- Integrity has been commonly defined as the consistency or coherence of a person to the principles s/he holds (McFall, 1987; Nilsen, 2005).
- The decisions of its maintenance flow from the reason and spirit of both the object of the decision and the person making it (Carter, 1996; Nilsen, 2005)
- Therefore, thinness, which symbolizes exercise self-discipline, will power, and self-control, will lead to an inference of greater integrity.

❖ Integrity and Social status

- When an individual lives according to the values, beliefs and principles that they have set for themselves, and have proclaimed to others, they feel at ease and have high self-esteem (Low and Ang, 2012).
- One may judge that others "have integrity" to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold and respect them, leading to a status impression (Darwall 1977, 2004; Pettit 1989; Warren 1997; Bird 2004; Lipworth et al., 2013)

We predict that a thinner body has become a status symbol. To explain this, we shift the focus of the preciousness and scarcity of goods to that of individual qualities (self-control, integrity).



STUDY 1

- Study design: two (body type: Thin vs Heavy) by two (gender of the observed individual: Male vs Female) between subjects design
- Sample: 246 undergraduate students (53.3% male; mean age 20 years)
- Procedure: Participants were randomly assigned to observe one of four conditions: a picture of a thin or heavy person—male or female — then asked to respond to a series of measures intended to capture self-control, integrity, and status on 7 Likert Scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*)

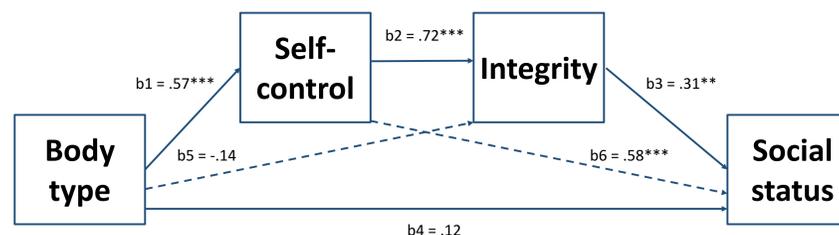


DATA ANALYSIS

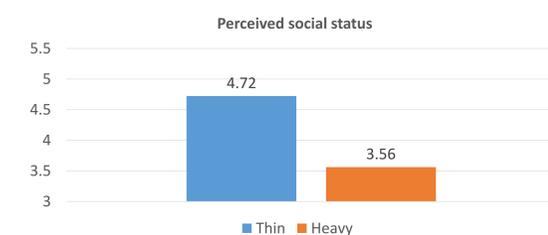
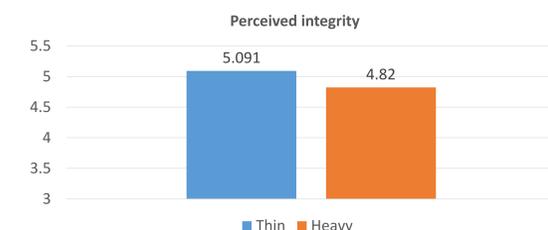
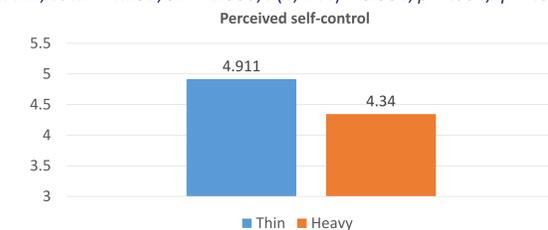
We assess the discriminant validity of the key constructs (i.e., body type, self-control, integrity, and status), comparing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each of our constructs with the squared correlation between constructs pairs. This test provides evidence for the discriminant validity of our measures.

STUDY 1: MEASUREMENT OF DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

	Perceived body type independent variable	Self-control mediator 1	Integrity mediator 2	Status dependent variable
Perceived body type independent variable	0.970			
Self-control mediator 1	0.120	0.726		
Integrity mediator 2	0.036	0.503	0.826	
Status dependent variable	0.065	0.386	0.309	0.859



- The total indirect effect was significant (.42; 95% CI from .19 to .65).
- The direct effect was not significant (.13, 95% CI from -.09 to .42).
- The indirect effect through self-control and integrity was significant (.13; 95% CI from .03 to .28).
- The indirect effect through self-control was significant (.33; 95% CI from .16 to .57).
- The indirect effect through integrity was not significant (-.04; 95% CI from -.15 to .01).
- A thin person ($M = 4.911, SD = 1.036$) was perceived to have greater self-control than a heavy person ($M = 4.340, SD = 1.065; F(1,244) = 18.136, p < .001, \eta^2 = .069$).
- There was a significant interaction effect between body size and perceived integrity ($F(1, 244) = 4.006, p = .046, \eta^2 = .016$). A thin person ($M = 5.091, SD = 1.123$) was perceived as having higher level of integrity than a heavy person ($M = 4.820, SD = .992$).
- There was also a significant effect of body size to perceived social status ($F(1, 244) = 8.584, p = .004, \eta^2 = .034$). A thin person was perceived as holding higher social status than a heavy person ($M = 4.720, SD = 1.412, vs M = 4.197, SD = 1.380; F(1, 244) = 8.584, p = .004, \eta^2 = .034$).



CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Our findings extend existing knowledge by identifying a prominent individual-level appearance cue (i.e., body size) that influences social status inferences, mediated through individual qualities rather than consumed products and services.
- A thinner person is evaluated as possessing more self-control and integrity than a heavier person. Self-control and integrity is a social-judgments that leads to trust (McFall, 1987; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 2005) and elicits expectation of justice (Fiske et al., 2002).
- A thinner body size can have positive implications in social situations involving self-control, integrity and their outcomes in organizational and marketing settings (e.g., organizational layoff announcement, leader's fairness impression, in-person customer complaint handling)