

Pretty Healthy Food: How and When Aesthetics Enhance Perceived Healthiness

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Abstract

- How do pretty aesthetics (defined by classical aesthetic principles, e.g., order, symmetry, balance) impact food healthiness judgments?
- In 11 studies (N=4,301), people perceived prettier food as healthier, specifically because classical aesthetic features make it appear more natural (e.g., pure, unprocessed). This pretty=healthy bias impacted financially consequential behavior.
- Perceived naturalness mediated the effect; expressive aesthetics, which do not evoke naturalness, did not produce the effect; and reminders of artificial modification, which suppress perceived naturalness, mitigated it.
- The effect was not attributable to price, taste, freshness, or care.

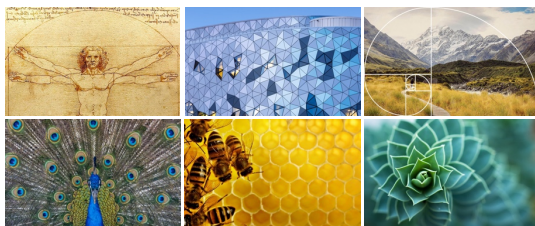
Theoretical Background

Beauty might seem pleasurable and thus **unhealthy**

- Aesthetics activate reward center (Chelnokova et al., 2014; Reimann et al., 2010); gratify (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008)
- Pleasure and instrumentality are believed to be mutually exclusive (e.g., Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2010; Okada, 2005; Raghunathan, Naylor, & Hoyer, 2006)

Beauty might seem natural and thus **healthy**

- Classical aesthetics (symmetry; order/regularity; balance/harmony) reflect patterns found in nature (Palmer, Schloss, & Sammartino, 2013)
- Natural things are more likely categorized as healthy (Rozin, 2005; Rozin et al., 2004)

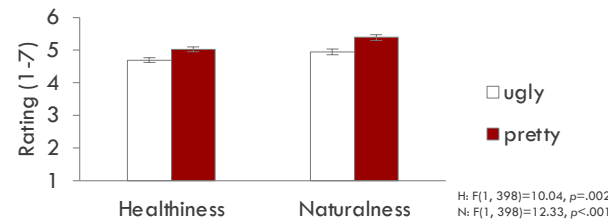


Study 1: Prettiness Increases Healthiness

- Evaluate ugly vs. pretty avocado toast

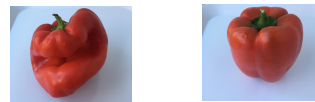


- DV: Healthiness (healthy, nutritious, good for me, low fat, low calorie)
- Mediator: Naturalness (natural, pure, unprocessed)

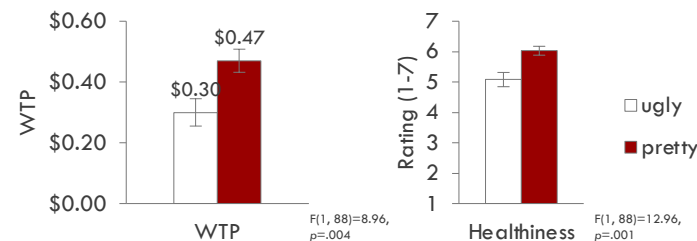


Study 2: Prettiness Boosts WTP via Healthiness

- Bid on ugly vs. pretty bell peppers

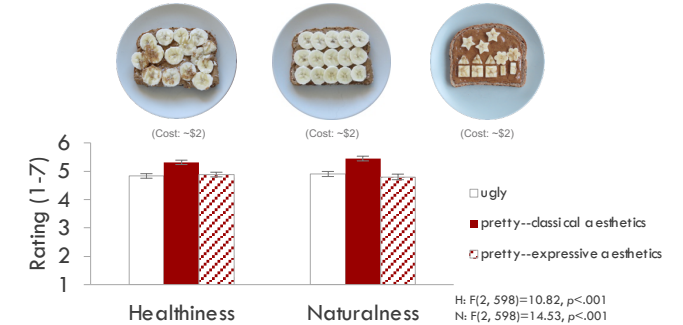


- DV: WTP
- Mediator: Healthiness



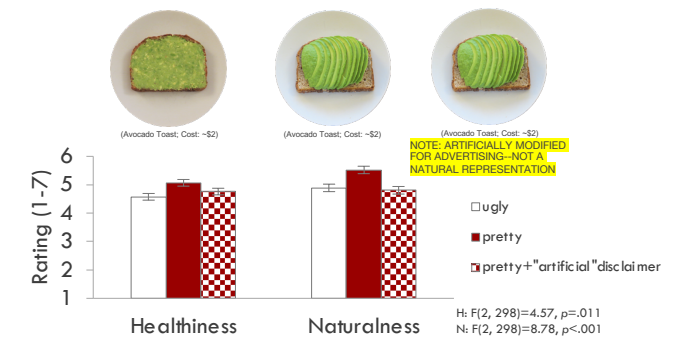
Study 3: Only Classical Aesthetics Cause Effect

- Rate ugly vs. classical-pretty vs. expressive-pretty banana toast



Study 4: Modification Disclaimer Quells Effect

- Evaluate ugly vs. pretty vs. pretty+modification disclaimer



Conclusions & Implications

- Reveals pretty=natural intuition; support natural=healthy belief
- Raises questions about potentially related prettiness-based inferences, e.g., potency, safety
- Points to disclaimers as an effective intervention