

Why do consumers think hard-to-get babes and products are worth the extra effort?

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Potential dates who are slightly elusive or products that are stuck on the back of a shelf are more attractive to consumers than their more attainable counterparts, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"To get the best outcomes or products, people usually have to expend effort," write authors Sarah Kim and Aparna A. Labroo (both University of Chicago). "This relationship between effort and value is so closely associated in a consumer's mind that wanting the best outcomes automatically results in increased [preference](#) for any outcome associated with effort, even pointless effort."

In one study, the authors had heterosexual males classify themselves as either "shy gawkers" or "smooth talkers." Participants were presented with a picture of a potential date that was either clear or blurred slightly (by 15 percent). "The shy gawkers behaved as one might expect, evaluating the date more favorably when they viewed the clear rather than the blurry picture," the authors write. "Quite surprisingly, however, the smooth talkers found the date more attractive when the picture was slightly blurry rather than clear."

The authors found similar results with [participants](#) who classified themselves as "smart shoppers." They indicated higher preferences for products when they had to travel across town to get them, even when they were available in a nearby store. They also preferred products that appeared to be pushed back on the shelves.

The authors even found that people who thought of themselves as "pioneers" rather than "[followers](#)" made more [donations](#) to a [charity](#) box when they had to stretch slightly (four feet) to make a contribution.

Luckily, when the researchers directed people's attention to the pointless nature of their efforts, they no longer valued the outcomes associated with the pointless effort. "So the next time you find yourself chasing that hottie, or you find yourself reaching to get a product way back on a shelf, pause for a moment and consider whether the outcome is really worth your effort," the authors conclude.

More information: Sarah Kim and Aparna A. Labroo. "From 'Inherent Value' to 'Incentive Value': When and Why Non-Instrumental Effort Enhances Consumer Preference." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2011 (published online June 21, 2011). ejcr.org

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