

Study: Heavier female hotel employees viewed warmer, more competent

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Female hotel employees who weigh more are perceived as more competent and kinder than women who weigh less, according to results of a study by Penn State researchers. Those same perceptions also predicted more positive evaluations of the hotel.

The study also showed that employees perceived to be "warmer" elicited more positive ratings of the [hotel](#), whereas perceptions of competence had no effect on satisfaction with the hotel.

The results could impact hotel management decisions because it contradicts a notion that customers would view higher weight "front-line" employees negatively. Instead, the study shows customers are basing their perceptions of satisfaction with the hotel on the warmth of customer service agents, and higher weight women are perceived to excel in that area.

Conducted by Larry Martinez, assistant professor of hospitality management and doctoral student Nicholas Smith at Penn State, along with Isaac Sabat at George Mason University, the study highlights the issue of stereotypes related to gender and weight at a time when being of higher weight is increasingly common in the United States.

"These findings are particularly important in the context of an industry that places a high emphasis on the aesthetics and appearance of its workforce," Martinez said. "Our findings suggest that the hospitality industry should instead focus on hiring and training workers in such a way as to increase how warm and friendly they are viewed by guests."

The findings, recently published by Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, are the result of a survey of 169 people.

Participants viewed a photo of a front desk employee and read a scenario regarding how the employee handled a customer checking into a hotel. Participants then answered questions about the employee and the hotel experience. The employee was presented as both male and female and both with higher weight and average weight.

Researchers found that participants viewed higher weight women as

warmer (more nurturing, kinder, etc.) and more competent (more intelligent, capable, etc.) than the women who were average weight.

"Though other research has shown that higher weight women receive more negative workplace experiences in terms of hiring and promotions than average weight women, we actually found a benefit from customers' perspectives," Martinez said. "This makes sense, based on common beliefs about higher weight individuals, which include a mixture of both positive and negative stereotypes. Specifically, higher weight individuals are generally thought to be friendly and jolly, but less conscientious and competent."

The weight of the male front desk agents had no impact on perceptions of the hotel.

"This highlights the greater emphasis on weight and appearance for women compared to men in society in general," Martinez said.

Researchers hope the study will encourage future research related to biases in the various workplace settings.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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