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Why Do Risks With Human Characteristics Make Powerful Consumers Feel Lucky?

People who feel powerful are more likely to believe they can beat cancer if it's described in human terms, according to new study in the Journal of Consumer Research.

The study looks at anthropomorphism, or the tendency to attribute humanlike characteristics, intentions, and behavior to nonhuman objects. "The present research shows important downstream consequences of anthropomorphism that go beyond simple liking of products with humanlike physical features," write authors Sara Kim and Ann L. McGill (both University of Chicago).

Previous consumer research has already demonstrated that consumers tend to like objects that they perceive to possess human characteristics. The authors take this further to investigate the effect of anthropomorphism on risk perception. "We examine people's assessment of the risks associated with a gambling machine and a disease and how these risk perceptions may vary depending on whether these risk-bearing entities are anthropomorphized or not," the authors write.

In their first study, the researchers found that participants, who had recently recalled an incident where they felt powerful perceived lower risk toward a slot machine game and were more likely to play it when the machine had a

humanlike face. In contrast, people who felt powerless felt greater risk in the game and were less willing to play it when the machine resembled a human.

In their next study, the authors found that people who felt powerful felt they could better control skin cancer when it was described as if it had humanlike evil intentions to hurt people. And people, who felt less powerful believed they had little control over the disease when it was described in human terms; therefore they perceived greater risk.

In a final experiment, the authors reversed the situation to try to determine whether risk perceptions would affect people's tendency to anthropomorphize depending on their feelings of power. "We show that participants with low power were more likely to anthropomorphize the slot machine after losing the game, whereas those with high power were more likely to anthropomorphize after winning the game," the authors conclude.

Sara Kim and Ann L. McGill. Gaming with Mr. Slot or Gaming the Slot Machine? Power, Anthropomorphism, and Risk Perception. *Journal of Consumer Research*, June 2011