

Why does a fancy purse say 'stay away from my man'?

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Women are unconsciously deterring romantic rivals by buying certain luxury items, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Spending on luxury goods in the US amounts to as much as \$525 billion per year, with women's products accounting for over half of this consumption. Why do women desire luxury goods?" write authors Yajin Wang and Vladas Griskevicius (both University of Minnesota).

Sometimes it's because they want other women to know their mates are spoken for. "Women at different ages and [relationship status](#) inferred that a woman with designer outfits and accessories has a more devoted partner," the authors write. "They also spontaneously inferred the partner financially contributed to these luxurious possessions. Such information is especially valuable when their relationship is threatened by another woman."

In a series of experiments, the researchers activated women's motivation to guard their relationships by having them imagine their [romantic partners](#) being flirtatious and intimate with another woman at a party. Then they assessed participants' desires for luxury products. "In one study, the women participants even physically drew [luxury brand](#) logos on handbags, shoes, T-shirts, and cars that were about twice the size compared to those who did not imagine the jealous theme at the party," the authors explain.

The authors also found that women indicated they would be less likely to pursue a man whose partner was wearing a luxury outfit and accessories because they perceived the man to be more devoted. "Whereas men often display luxury products to the opposite sex, women often seek to flaunt expensive possessions to the same sex," the authors write. "This might be particularly interesting to luxury brand practitioners and managers to understand that women are the primary audiences of women's luxury consumption."

"Mate guarding is, of course, not the only function of women's [conspicuous consumption](#)," the authors explain, citing past research showing that [luxury goods](#) also make women happy or signal status and taste. "In essence, Fendi handbags fend off romantic rivals, and flaunting designer products says 'Back off!'" the authors conclude.

More information: Yajin Wang and Vladas Griskevicius.

"Conspicuous Consumption, Relationships, and Rivals: Women's Luxury Products as Signals to Other Women." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2014.

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