

Study identifies 5 factors that promote a positive body image in women

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Women with high family support and limited pressure to achieve the 'thin and beautiful' ideal have a more positive body image. That's according to a new study looking at five factors that may help young women to be more positive about their bodies, in the context of a society where discontent with appearance is common among women. The work by Dr. Shannon Snapp, from the University of Arizona in the US, and colleagues is published online in Springer's journal, *Sex Roles*.

Many women in contemporary Western cultures are dissatisfied with their bodies, a risk factor for eating problems. Snapp and team examined factors that make women more resilient when it comes to their [body image](#), in a bid to help those women at risk of eating disorders. They focussed on young college women who are likely to experience self-consciousness as they compare themselves with peers and become involved in [social groups](#) and organizations that place a high value on appearance.

A total of 301 first-year college women, from two universities in the US, completed questionnaires based on the Choate theoretical model. This model hypothesizes that family support and low levels of pressure to attain the thin ideal are related to the rejection of the superwoman ideal, positive views of physical competence, and effective stress-busting strategies. These factors are associated with well-being, which in turn is linked to positive body image in women. The researchers put this model to the test in a 'real life' situation.

They found that young women with high family support and low levels of perceived socio-cultural pressure from family, friends and the media regarding the importance of achieving a 'thin and beautiful' ideal had a more positive body image. These same women also rejected the superwoman ideal, had a positive physical self-concept, and were armed with skills to deal with stress.

Practical recommendations for [prevention programs](#) aimed at young women at risk of eating disorders include helping women to evaluate and become comfortable with the multiple and often contradictory expectations placed upon them in today's society; teaching them to use effective coping skills; fostering a positive view of their physical competence through exercise and health; and promoting holistic well-being and balance in their lives.

The authors conclude: "It is particularly important for women to develop a sense of self-worth that is not solely based on appearance, and to build resilience to pressures they may receive from family, friends and the media."

More information: Snapp S et al (2012). A body image resilience model for first-year college women. *Sex Roles*; 10.1007/s11199-012-0163-1

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