

Ideal body size identified

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(Medical Xpress)—The ideal male and female bodies according to each of the sexes have been identified by researchers at Newcastle University using a special 3D design programme.

The findings, published today in the journal *PLOS One*, reveal the remarkable similarities and differences in what men and women find attractive but also what they perceive to be attractive in their own sex. The research is part of a bigger project looking at the causes of, and possible treatments for, anorexia.

Eighty [heterosexual men](#) and women, average age 19, were asked what the ideal [body](#) size and shape was they wanted for themselves and their partners and what the important [physical features](#) in this ideal were. They used the design programme to create their ultimate body shapes and the researchers used this to calculate BMI and measure other factors such as waist and chest size.

Interestingly both sexes selected images for the opposite sex and themselves which were of healthy body sizes.

However they also over-played the importance of a large upper body. For example women over-emphasised chest size while men beefed up their legs and chest.

Thirty nine of the forty women had a higher BMI than their designed body would have had, while half the men were heavier than their ideal [body shape](#).

Using the programme the shape and size of a 3D body can be altered in over 90 independent dimensions using sliders, allowing each participant to create the exact size and shape of the body they want.

Male and female heterosexual observers set their own ideal [body size](#) and shape, and the ideal size and shape of their partner using the [3D image](#) manipulation programme.

Predictably the most important feature for the ideal female body seems to be a very slim body, a BMI of approximately 19, which is only just in the healthy range at the bottom of BMI scale. This was true both of the female ideal produced by women and the ideal female partner's body set by the men.

For male [physical attractiveness](#), upper body strength seemed to be the most important feature. Both men's ideal body and women's ideal male partner's body has wide shoulders and chest and a narrow waist (the classic V-shaped torso), with a BMI of about 25, again only just in the healthy range, but this time at the top of the scale.

So both men and women agree on what is beautiful in their respective sexes, but the male and female bodies differ in what is needed to be attractive. The female body needs to be slim, but the male body needs to be big and muscular.

Lead author of the paper, Dr Martin Tovee, Reader in visual cognition at Newcastle University, said: "Previous studies have been a lot more limited in the options it gave people to select their [ideal body](#) shapes. This way gave them complete freedom to create what they thought would be attractive and what they found attractive themselves.

"Much of what we found isn't surprising, in that healthy body shapes are also the most attractive, which from an evolutionary point of view makes

sense. But social factors seem to have come into play as well, with both sexes over estimating key areas such as amount of muscle or breast size.

"Neither model differed in huge amounts though so maybe men aren't from Mars and women from Venus, we're a lot closer in our opinions than that."

For the next stage of the project the team will ask the volunteers to estimate their own body size using the same programme. This will be used to identify if there is a link between weight and perceptions of weight.

Provided by Newcastle University

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