

# 'Listening to your heart' could improve body image, study finds

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Women who are more aware of their bodies from within are less likely to think of their bodies principally as objects, according to research published February 6 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Vivien Ainley and Manos Tsakiris from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London.

The authors asked healthy female student volunteers aged between 19 – 26 to concentrate and count their own heartbeats, simply by "listening" to their bodies. Their accuracy in this heartbeat perception test was compared with their degree of self-objectification, based on how significant they considered 10 body attributes to their sense of self. Attributes were both appearance-based, like attractiveness and [body measurements](#), and competence-based, such as health and energy levels.

The more accurate the women were in detecting their heartbeats, the less they tended to think of their bodies as objects. These findings have important implications for understanding [body](#) image dissatisfaction and clinical disorders which are linked to self-objectification, such as anorexia.

Dr Manos Tsakiris from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway said: "People have the remarkable ability to perceive themselves from the perspective of an outside observer. However, there is a danger that some women can develop an excessive tendency to regard their bodies as 'objects', while neglecting to value them from within, for their physical competence and health. Women who 'self-

objectify', in this way, are vulnerable to eating disorders and a range of other clinical conditions such as depression and sexual dysfunction."

Fellow researcher Vivien Ainley commented that "We believe that our measure of [body awareness](#), which assesses how well women are able to listen to their internal signals, will prove a valuable addition to research into self-[objectification](#) and women's resulting mental health."

**More information:** Ainley V, Tsakiris M (2013) Body Conscious? Interoceptive Awareness, Measured by Heartbeat Perception, Is Negatively Correlated with Self-Objectification. PLoS ONE 8(2): e55568. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0055568](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0055568)

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