

# Women who are told men desire women with larger bodies are happier with their weight

January 13 2015, by Margaret Allen

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Telling women that men desire larger women who aren't model-thin made the women feel better about their own weight in a series of new studies.

Results of the three independent studies suggest a woman's [body image](#) is strongly linked to her perception of what she thinks [men](#) prefer, said lead researcher and social psychologist Andrea Meltzer, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

How women perceive men's preferences influenced each woman's body image independent of her actual body size and [weight](#).

"On average, [heterosexual women](#) believe that heterosexual men desire ultra-thin women," said Meltzer, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at SMU. "Consequently, this study suggests that interventions that alter women's perception regarding men's desires for ideal female body sizes may be effective at improving women's body image."

The findings could have significant implications for women's health and well-being, Meltzer said.

Prior research has shown that women satisfied with their body and weight tend to eat healthier, exercise more, and have higher self-esteem. They also tend to avoid unhealthy behaviors, such as excessive dieting and eating disorders, and they suffer less from depression.

In contrast, other research has demonstrated that women unhappy with their body and weight have less sex, less sexual [satisfaction](#), and less marital satisfaction.

"It is possible that women who are led to believe that men prefer women with bodies larger than the models depicted in the media may experience higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression," Meltzer said.

A total of 448 women participated in the three studies, conducted by Meltzer and co-author James K. McNulty, Florida State University.

The authors note that prior research has shown that women who watch TV and read more fashion magazines are less satisfied with their weight and have a poor body image.

Meltzer and McNulty wanted to test whether a woman's feelings about her own weight would be influenced if she viewed images of larger-bodied women when told they were judged attractive by men.

The authors reported their findings in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. The article, "Telling women that men desire women with bodies larger than the thin-ideal improves women's body satisfaction," has been published online ahead of print.

Women's weight satisfaction improved after image manipulation exercise

In all three studies, female participants viewed images of female models with bodies larger than the thin-ideal wearing a variety of clothing, ranging from typical street clothes to bathing suits. In each image, the models' heads were cropped so participants wouldn't be influenced by facial attractiveness. The women in the images were cataloged by participants as ranging in U.S. clothing size from 8 to 10, which is slightly smaller than the average for American women, size 12-14, but larger than model-thin, typically size 2-4.

Each study also included one or more control groups. Some women were shown the images of large-bodied women, but without portraying them as attractive to men. Others were shown images of women who were ultra-thin and told that men preferred them. Still another group was shown both the larger-bodied and ultra-thin women and told that women felt the larger-bodied women were more attractive.

Women in all groups completed a self-report questionnaire designed to measure weight satisfaction.

In all three studies, women had higher levels of satisfaction with their own weight after viewing the images of the larger women who were portrayed as attractive to men, while statistically controlling their actual

weight.

"Although the current studies demonstrated that telling women that men prefer women with body sizes larger than the thin-ideal can have immediate positive effects on women's [body](#) image, it is unclear how long these effects may last," Meltzer said. "Indeed, all studies assessed women's weight satisfaction immediately after the manipulation. It would likely take repeated exposure to images of larger-bodied women ostensibly desired by men to strongly rival the patterns of reinforcement that are so pervasive in the media."

All participants were heterosexual [women](#) and the majority identified as Caucasian.

**More information:** "Telling Women That Men Desire Women With Bodies Larger Than the Thin-Ideal Improves Women's Body Satisfaction." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 1948550614561126, first published on December 10, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/1948550614561126](#)

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