

# Research shows that body image is strongly linked to overall life satisfaction and feelings about romantic relationships

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Chapman University has just published the results of a national study on the factors linked to satisfaction with appearance and weight. In a survey of more than 12,000 Americans adults, the questions focused on personality, beliefs about romantic relationships, self-esteem, television viewing, and personal characteristics.

"Our study shows that men's and women's feelings about their weight and [appearance](#) play a major role in how satisfied they are with their lives overall," said David Frederick, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at Chapman University and lead author on the study.

For women, [satisfaction](#) with overall appearance was the third strongest predictor of overall [life satisfaction](#), behind only satisfaction with financial situation and satisfaction with romantic partner. For men, appearance satisfaction was the second strongest predictor of life satisfaction, behind only satisfaction with financial situation.

"Few men (24 percent) and women (20 percent) felt very or extremely satisfied with their weight, and only half felt somewhat to extremely satisfied," said Dr. Frederick. "These findings are consistent with the emphasis placed on the importance of being slender for women and for appearing athletic and/or lean for men. It would seem therefore, that we still have a long way to go before we achieve the goal of Americans being truly happy with their bodies."

People who were dissatisfied with their weight reported substantially less satisfaction with their sex lives and lower overall self-esteem. The results also showed that people's orientations towards their relationships—known as "attachment styles"—were linked to how people felt about their bodies. People with an "anxious" attachment style are often preoccupied with their romantic relationships and fearful that their partners will leave them. Women with more anxious and fearful attachment styles were more dissatisfied with their appearance and weight.

Dr. Frederick noted that, "[body dissatisfaction](#) and anxious attachment styles can lead to an out of control spiral and fuel each other. People who are less confident in their appearance become more fearful that their partner will leave, which further fuels their worries about their

appearance."

The results showed that dissatisfied people had higher neuroticism, had more preoccupied and fearful attachment styles, and spent more hours watching television. In contrast, satisfied people had higher openness, conscientious, extraversion, are more secure in attachment style, and had higher self-esteem and life satisfaction.

### **Other key findings included:**

- People who watched more hours of television per week were less satisfied with their appearance and weight.
- People who were more satisfied with their physical appearance and weight reported more secure attachment styles, versus fearful and dismissive attachment styles.
- People who were more satisfied with their appearance reported greater self-esteem, greater satisfaction with life, sex life, friends, romantic partners, family, and financial situation.
- Body Mass Index (BMI) was strongly related to dissatisfaction with appearance and weight.

"These findings highlight the high prevalence of body dissatisfaction and the factors linked to dissatisfaction among U.S. adults," said Dr. Frederick.

The study called, Correlates of appearance and weight satisfaction in a U.S. national Sample: Personality, attachment style, television viewing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction is published in the journal *Body Image*. The sample of participants was 12,176 U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 65 years who reported their height, [weight](#) and sexual orientation.

**More information:** David A. Frederick et al, Correlates of appearance and weight satisfaction in a U.S. National Sample: Personality,

attachment style, television viewing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, *Body Image* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.04.001)

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