

# Researchers measure impact of looking at pictures of skinny women

August 31 2017, by Bob Yirka

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Sample thin size and plus size models. *bioRxiv* (2017). DOI: 10.1101/176107

(Medical Xpress)—A small group of researchers from the U.K. has found that exposing people to just 15 minutes of viewing pictures of women can influence their perception of the ideal female body type. In their paper uploaded to the *bioRxiv* preprint server, Jean-Luc Jucker, Tracey Thornborrow, Lynda Boothroyd and Martin Tovee describe research on people unexposed to modern media and their suggestibility

regarding how they believe a woman should look.

To learn more about the impact of people looking at pictures of women with thin bodies, the researchers traveled to the Mosquito Coast in Nicaragua—there, people living in villages do not have electricity, and therefore have not been exposed on a continuing basis to images of women with thin bodies.

The researchers asked 80 individuals of various ages and both genders to sit alone at a computer and use software that allowed them to build a woman based on what they believed the ideal female form to be. Each was then shown multiple pictures of women from a clothing catalogue for approximately 15 minutes—some saw pictures from a "normal" catalogue that used typically thin models and some from a plus-size catalogue. Then, each participant was once again asked to create the perfect female form on the computer.

The researchers report that those people who had viewed the pictures of thin models created on average thinner women using the software on the second trial, while those who had viewed the plus-sized models increased the size of the virtual women they created.



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The researchers suggest that their experiments show that perceptions of the ideal [body type](#) can be influenced by looking at [pictures](#) of women for a mere 15 minutes. The group notes that their study was not able to offer any evidence of how long the effect might last, but suggest that people living in places where [women](#) are virtually always presented in the media as thin are likely to experience a lasting impact. The team notes also that those people who volunteered in the study are scheduled to be wired for electricity very soon, giving them access to television and the internet. Because of that, the group took it upon themselves to report their findings to local schools and churches.

**More information:** Jean-Luc Jucker et al. The effect of the thin body

ideal in a media-naive population, *bioRxiv* (2017). [DOI: 10.1101/176107](https://doi.org/10.1101/176107)

## **Abstract**

The thin ideal is the western concept of an ideally slim or underweight female body, and its omnipresence in the mass media has a negative impact on women's health. Media consumption is associated with a drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and disordered eating in women of western and/or industrialised societies. Furthermore, cross-cultural research suggests that the media have similar effects when they are introduced into non-western or non-industrialised societies. No study, however, has attempted to induce a change in female body size ideals in a population that is not exposed to the thin ideal and that has currently no access to the media. Here we show experimentally that a short exposure to the thin ideal can change body size ideals in a media-naive population. 80 rural Nicaraguan men and women with very low to non-existent media access created their ideal female body before and after seeing photographs of either thin or plus size fashion models. Analyses revealed a significant interaction between time and group, meaning that exposure to media images shifted the subjects' ideal female body size. We discuss problems posed by the pervasiveness of the thin body ideal in the context of the global obesity pandemic.

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