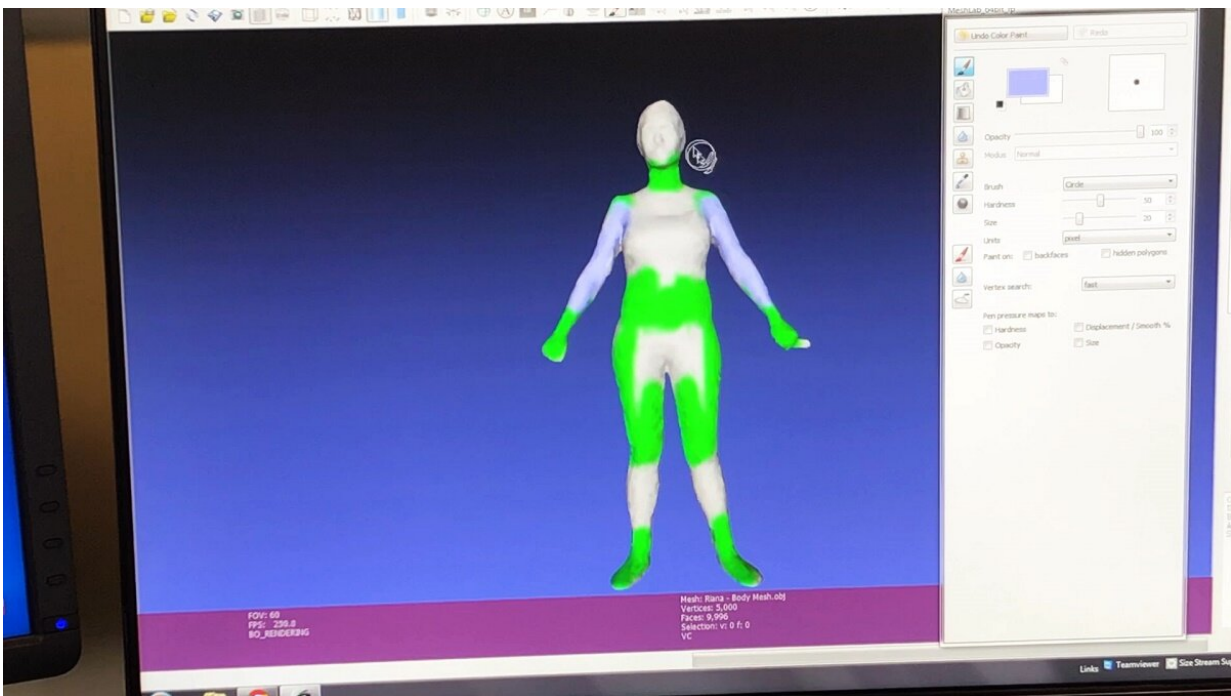# 3-D technology might improve body appreciation for young women

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In a new study from the MU Center for Body Image Research and Policy, researchers found that digitally painting 3D avatars might have positive effects on body image and mental health. Credit: University of Missouri-Columbia

3-D technology has transformed movies and medical imaging, and now it might be able to help young women better appreciate their bodies.

Virginia Ramseyer Winter, assistant professor in the School of Social

Work and director of the MU Center for Body Image Research and Policy, is a nationally recognized [body](#) image expert. In a new study, she found that images from 3-D scanners can be used to help young women focus on body appreciation, which might in turn improve mental health.

"3-D body image scanning is a relatively new tool in [social science research](#), and the research on using 3-D tools for improving body image is scant," Ramseyer Winter said. "We wanted to see if it could provide a way to help young women shift their focus away from appearance and toward function."

In her study, young adult women between the ages of 18 and 25 were scanned in a 3-D scanner used by researchers and students in MU's Department of Apparel and Textile Management. The researchers used modeling software to convert the scans to 3-D avatars. Participants then digitally "painted" body parts that they appreciated for various reasons such as their utility or role in their relationships.

"In digitally painting their avatars, [women](#) could think about how, for example, their thighs help them run or how their arms can help hold others in an embrace," Ramseyer Winter said. "It provided the participants a way to visual their bodies in a completely different way. It allowed the participants to recognize how our bodies are much more than a size or a number on a scale."

Immediately and then again three months after digitally painting their avatars, participants reported increased body appreciation over time. Moreover, participants reported lower depressive and anxiety symptoms.

"While more research still needs to be done on the relationship between the 3-D image intervention we used and its impact on mental health, we did see a significant effect on body appreciation," Ramseyer Winter said. "Prior research has shown that body appreciation is related to

depression and anxiety, which leads us to think that we are on the right track in creating an intervention that can improve not only [body image](#), but [mental health](#) as well."

Future research will look at how painting the 3-D avatars impacts [young women](#) with more severe depression.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia