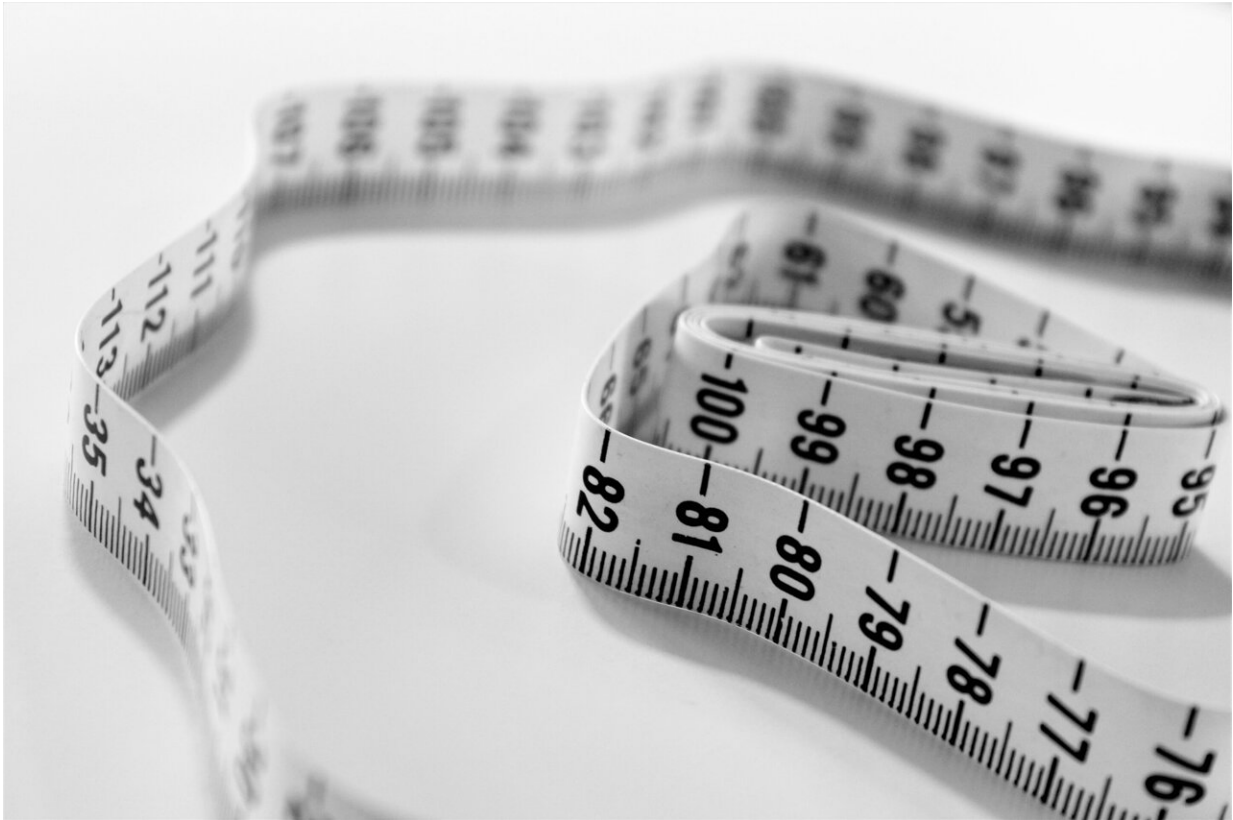


# Appearance fixation linked to dating anxiety

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New research has discovered that young adults who are more focused on and concerned about their appearance are more likely to suffer from anxiety when dating.

Led by Professor Viren Swami of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), the

study is the largest ever undertaken into [body image](#) and dating [anxiety](#), which is defined as distress associated with interactions with potential romantic partners.

The research, published in the journal *Body Image*, found that people who are more appearance oriented are more likely to experience social physique anxiety, which is a concern about physical appearance in [social situations](#).

This in turn is associated with two forms of dating anxiety—fear of negative evaluations and social distress—and these results were consistent amongst both women and men.

The research involved 501 heterosexual young adults from the UK, with an average age of 21, who completed questionnaires to measure aspects of body image, social physique anxiety, and dating anxiety.

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements such as "Before going out in public, I always notice how I look", "When it comes to displaying my physique/figure to others, I am a shy person", and "I am afraid that the person I am dating will find fault with me".

Because [interpersonal relationships](#) play such an important role in the social and emotional development of young adults, the researchers believe that targeted interventions could be used to help reduce anxiety in dating contexts. They also warn that dating anxiety can lead to various mental health and behavioural problems.

Lead author Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "Our results suggest that having an unhealthy fixation with appearance is associated with social physique anxiety, and those with high levels of social physique anxiety are more fearful of negative evaluations from others in dating contexts, and are

also more likely to experience greater social distress when interacting with potential romantic partners.

"Dating can be especially difficult for these individuals, and they are more likely to avoid situations and activities in which their bodies and appearance may be scrutinised, such as first dates.

"These issues are far from trivial for [young adults](#). We know that significant levels of dating anxiety and distress can lead to various mental health and behavioural issues, such as lower self-esteem, poorer sexual development, feelings of loneliness, a lack of confidence and assertiveness, and inhibition in seeking romantic relationships.

"As our research indicates that body image attitudes and social physique anxiety are strongly associated with dating anxiety, it may be useful to consider whether interventions designed to manage and reduce appearance-based anxieties, such as enhancement of self-compassion or mindfulness-based therapies, also help to reduce dating anxiety."

**More information:** Body Image and Dating Anxiety - Associations between Body Image, Social Physique Anxiety, and Dating Anxiety in Heterosexual Emerging Adults, *Body Image* (2021).

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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