

Women with high body dissatisfaction spend more time looking at thinner women, finds study

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Women who are dissatisfied with their body shape spend more time looking at their thinner counterparts, finds a new University of Bristol-

led study involving nearly 3,000 women. The research, published in *Body Image*, aimed to understand more about risk factors for eating disorders and potential targets for new treatment interventions.

Previous studies have suggested that women with high body dissatisfaction display an [attentional bias](#) towards low-weight bodies, which is thought to exacerbate feelings of body dissatisfaction. However, until now, these findings have been inconsistent.

Researchers evaluated the results of 34 studies comprising 2,857 women who had participated in a range of attentional bias tasks including gaze tracking to see whether those who were more dissatisfied with their own bodies directed more attention to thinner body shapes.

After pooling the results, the team found evidence for this [positive association](#) in women, but only for studies using gaze tracking as a measure of attentional bias. Women with high body dissatisfaction, when compared to [women](#) with low body dissatisfaction, directed their gaze more frequently and for longer durations towards low-weight female body stimuli.

Thea House, the study's lead author and a Ph.D. student at the University of Bristol and Macquarie University, explains, "Body dissatisfaction is a risk factor for eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and purging disorder. It is also a key diagnostic symptom of anorexia nervosa. Women experiencing body dissatisfaction may be worsening it by spending more time looking at thinner body sizes.

"Our findings have implications for the prevention and treatment of eating disorders and suggest that interventions such as attention training tasks, which have been used to improve symptoms of anxiety, could be adapted to treat symptoms of eating disorders by shifting attention away

from thin body sizes. These types of task can be completed on a home computer, so they have potential to be a practical and cost-effective treatment option for people with these disorders."

More information: T. House et al, Is body dissatisfaction related to an attentional bias towards low weight bodies in non-clinical samples of women? A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Body Image* (2022).

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