

# The relationship between body concern and visual perspective: remembering body shape through a stranger's eyes.

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## Background, Aims and Predictions

### Background

Previous research into body image has found a relationship between high body concern and how memories focused on appearance are recalled, especially in terms of visual perspective, vividness and negativity. For example, Osman & Cooper (2004) found that those with Body Dysmorphic disorder viewed memories focusing on the appearance from an observer perspective and rated them as more vivid and negative. However, despite evidence that body concern is increasing within the normal population (37% of 18-34 asked were dissatisfied with their body, British Social Attitudes Survey, 2014), past research has not focused on those with a non-clinical body concern.

### Present study

#### Aims

- To distinguish whether a relationship exists between non-clinical body concern and the visual perspective, vividness and negativity of a memory focused on the body.

#### Predictions

- Body concern would predict recalling the memory focused on the body from an observer perspective
- Those with a higher body concern would view memories focused on the body as more vivid and also as more negative
- Those with a higher body concern would have a lower self-esteem



Figure 1

'We all weighed ourselves and had to input our weights onto a spreadsheet. Mine was considerably higher than other people's and lots of people shouted out saying oh my god who's the fatty with that weight and someone said "oh I bet it's her" and pointed to me' - Alice

## Method

**Participants:** 112 participants: female, 18-25, no history of an eating disorder.

**Measures:** The study was an online questionnaire composed of two sections.

### Section One: Memory.

Participants recalled a memory focused on their body and rated it on perspective, vividness and negativity.

**Section Two: Body-Image and Self-Esteem.** Participants were asked to fill in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the 16-item Body Shape Questionnaire (Evans & Dolan, 1993).



Figure 3

'Whilst walking the dogs in summer a teenage group of boys walked behind us. One of the boys commented on the shorts I was wearing and said that I shouldn't be wearing them due to the size of my legs. He told me I should keep them covered as no one wants to see them.' - Sarah

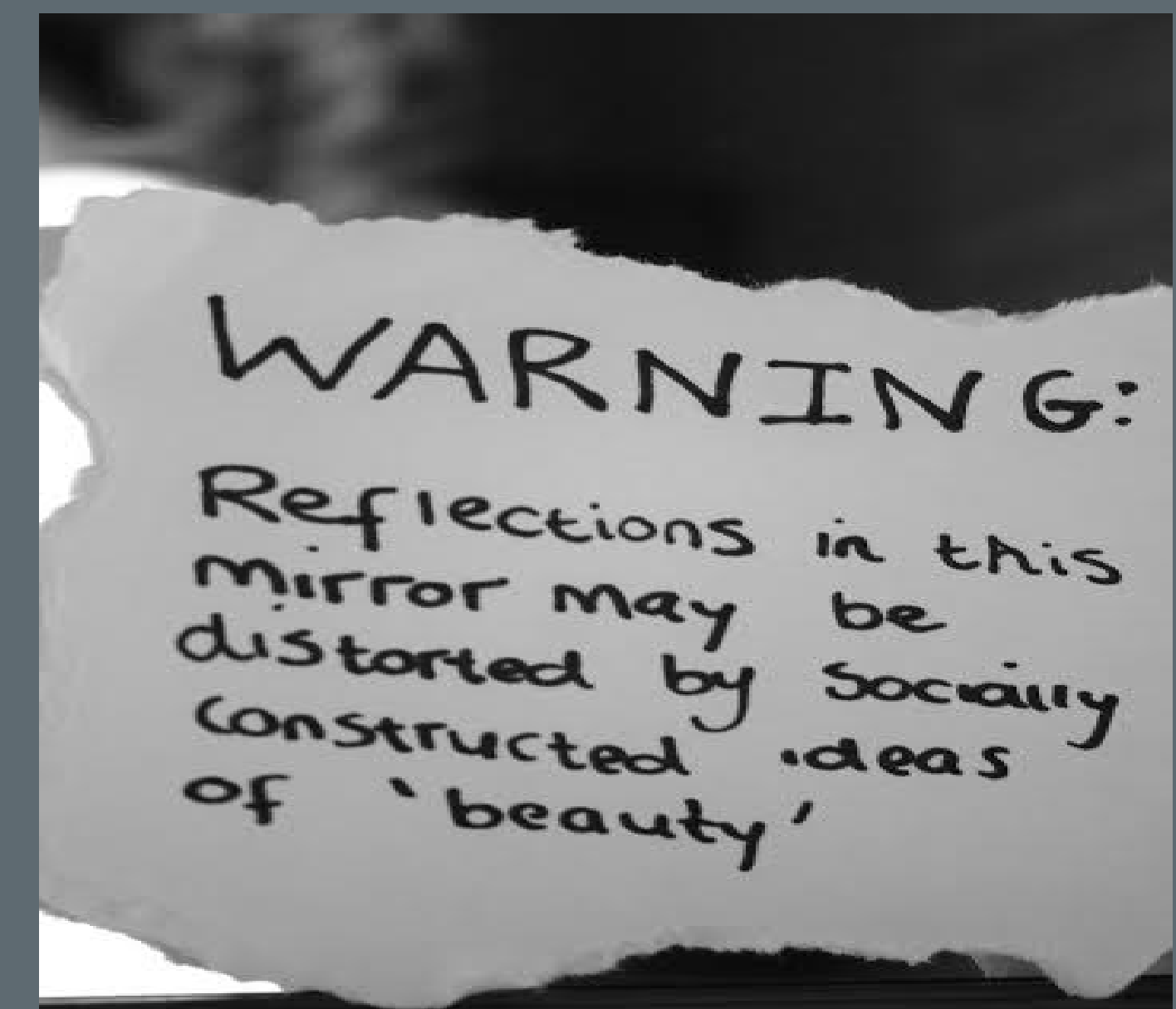


Figure 2

## Results

- A negative moderate correlation was found between body concern and self-esteem. Those with a lower self-esteem had a higher body concern
- Average Self-Esteem score was 16.30 which was significantly lower than the average which is around 22 (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003), as indicated by a one sample t test ( $t(111) = 10.10, p < .001$ ).
- Average body concern was 53.76 which indicates a moderate body concern (Evans, <http://www.psych.org/tools/bsq/>, 2016)
- A positive moderate correlation was found between body concern and memory negativity: Those with a higher body concern rated the memory as more negative.
- A negative weak correlation was found between body concern and memory vividness: Those with a higher body concern rated the memory as more vivid.
- Although no significant correlation was found between body concern and memory perspective, when other factors were controlled for in a multiple hierarchical regression, body concern was found to predict perspective ( $R^2 \text{ change} = 0.04, \beta = -0.25, p < .05$ )

### Correlational factors

Correlational factors	Correlation Coefficient
Body Concern & Self-Esteem	-.61**+
Body Concern & Memory Perspective	-.15
Body Concern & Memory Negativity	.45**
Body Concern & Memory Vividness	.38**

\*\* Significant at 0.001 level

## Discussion

Overall, the results found that high body concern was a predictor of the way memories focused on the body were recalled, especially in relation to vividness, negativity and visual perspective.

The finding that body concern predicted memory perspective can be explained by 3 theories:

- Social Phobia Model** (Clark & Wells, 1995)—using an observer perspective allowed individuals to predict how they were seen by others. Body concern is maintained as these predictions are distorted.
- The Dispassionate Observer** (Sutin & Robins, 2008) – memories were recalled from an observer perspective in order to distance the individual from the memory as it posed a potential threat
- The Self-Objectification theory** (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997)—women adopt an observer perspective as they are used to being objectified and wish to predict how others see their body shape. Body concern is maintained due to high self-consciousness

The average self-esteem and body concern score indicate that the current sample of 18-25 year olds have low self-esteem and high body dissatisfaction. Future research and campaigns into body image should attempt to change this.

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study but using qualitative methodology
- Compare the recall of memories focusing on the body in samples with clinical body dissatisfaction and non-clinical body dissatisfaction
- Compare the recall of memories focusing on the body across genders

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