

# Women's body talk: Perception stronger than reality?

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How women think their friends feel about their bodies influences their own body concerns, according to a new study by Dr. Louise Wasylikiw and Molly Williamson from Mount Alison University in Canada. Their work, which examines the role of friends in young women's body concerns, is published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Research shows that friends influence how girls and women view and judge their own body weight, shape and size. What Wasylikiw and Williamson's work sheds light on, is how much of a young woman's body concerns are shaped by her perceptions of [peers'](#) concerns with their own body versus her peers' actual body concerns.

The researchers analysed data for 75 pairs of female friends from a small undergraduate university in Eastern Canada. They asked the women how often they talked to their friend about four different weight issues: weight loss, exercise, appearance and food/eating. They also assessed the women's body image and whether they felt pressure from their friends on weight issues.

They found that the more women felt under pressure to be thin, the more likely they were to have body image concerns, irrespective of their actual weight and shape. Interestingly, body talk between friends that focussed on exercise was related to lower [body dissatisfaction](#).

Women perceived their friends' body checking behaviors to be similar to their own. In addition, women's body concerns were mirrored by their

perceptions of what their friends' body image concerns were, suggesting that perceptions of friends', and not friends' actual thoughts, predicted their own body concerns.

The authors conclude: "Our research demonstrates that friends influence each other through at least three processes: perceived pressure to be thin; body-related talk; and perceptions. Although these perceptions are somewhat grounded in reality i.e. close to the truth, they are more influential than reality."

**More information:** Wasyliw L & Williamson M (2012). Actual reports and perceptions of body image concerns of young women and their friends. *Sex Roles*; [DOI 10.1007/s11199-012-0227-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0227-2)

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