

# Mothers play powerful role in shaping daughters' body image, say psychologists

October 6 2023

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Experts have warned that "fat talk" by mothers can unwittingly create problems for their daughter's body satisfaction and even cause future

disordered eating.

Flinders University psychology experts have found the effects of female familial influences by [mothers](#) and sisters can exert considerable pressure on [young women's body image](#)—with mothers often more influential and more likely to use fat talk than sisters.

[The new study published in \*Body Image\*](#) used the Tripartite Influence sociocultural model to survey 422 young Australian women (17–25 years old) to determine the behavioral and emotional effects of appearance pressures and fat talk by mothers and sisters.

"Greater appearance pressures and fat talk from mothers and sisters are associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction, dieting or eating restriction and bulimic behaviors," says registered psychologist and lead author Melanie Deek, from Flinders University's College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

"Appearance pressures from mothers and sisters can lead to young women becoming more likely to engage in their own appearance comparisons and thin-ideal beliefs.

"Overall, the participants perceived more appearance pressures from their mothers than their sisters, and reported that their mothers exhibited more fat talk than their sisters."

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of peer pressure and [social media](#) on disorderly eating and body image problems, including a recent article on influencers setting the agenda via Instagram.

The research indicates that [sibling relationships](#), in contrast to [parent-child relationships](#), function more closely to peer relationships while parents may wield a strong influence due to a mother's role in the family

and home.

Appearance comparisons is the tendency to compare one's [physical appearance](#) to that of others while "internalization" is the extent to which an individual 'buys into' culturally defined and approved ideals of attractiveness, or the "thin ideal."

"Development of maladaptive body image and problem eating behavior have many key sociocultural influences," says body image expert Associate Professor Prichard, who leads the Embrace Impact Lab at Flinders University.

Professor of Psychology Eva Kemps, another co-author on the study, adds that parents, peers and the media are the main influences on the development of positive or negative body image.

"These findings demonstrate how important mothers and sisters are, highlighting the need to promote positive body image and model a healthy relationship with the body within the home."

Body image resources for parents from The Embrace Collective can be found at [www.bodyimageresources.com](http://www.bodyimageresources.com)

**More information:** Melanie Rebecca Deek et al, The mother-daughter-sister triad: The role of female family members in predicting body image and eating behaviour in young women, *Body Image* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.07.001)

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Mothers play powerful role in shaping daughters' body image, say psychologists (2023,

October 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-mothers-play-powerful-role-daughters.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.