

How Parent Comments Relate to Female Weight Satisfaction
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Many parents worry about their child's weight. This is not surprising considering the media coverage of "childhood obesity" and the warnings that children who meet BMI criteria for "overweight" or "obese" are at risk for a multitude of emotional and medical problems. Parents often grapple with how best to intervene, or if they should intervene at all. A new research study published by Wansink, Latimer, and Pope in the June 2016 issue of *Eating and Weight Disorders* investigates the effects of parent's comments about their daughter's weight.

The authors conducted a retrospective study in which they asked 501 adult women between the ages of 20-35 to recall comments that their parents had made about their weight or eating habits when they were growing up. All participants were recruited from a national panel and had lived in the United States for at least 2 generations. Participants were administered a 7-item survey that asked about comments a parent made about her weight, comments a parent made about her eating behaviors (amount of food consumed), and whether or not her parent was concerned about his/her own weight. It is important to keep in mind that this is a retrospective study asking about participants' memories of these comments so it is really measuring participants' *perceptions* of these event, rather than a true measure of how frequently these events actually occurred. Participants were also asked a question to assess weight satisfaction ("how many pounds would you need to lose to be satisfied with your weight?"). The researchers obtained self-report data on participants' height and weight, which was used to calculate the BMI of each participant.

Results indicated that participants who were classified as "normal weight" recalled that their parents were less likely to make weight-related comments, were less likely to make comments about eating too much, and were less concerned about their own (the parent's) weight, compared to participants classified as "overweight." Among the "normal weight" participants, women who recalled their parents making comments about their weight were 8.2 pounds more dissatisfied with their bodies. Both parental comments about a daughter's weight and comments about eating too much were significant predictors of adult BMI; the more parent's commented, the higher the adult child's BMI. A similar relationship held between parental comments about weight (but not eating behaviors) and adult body satisfaction; the more parents commented, the more dissatisfied the adult daughter felt about her body. A parent's concern about his/her own weight was not a significant predictor of adult BMI but was associated with increased concern about their daughter's weight and with the daughter paying more attention to the caloric content of foods.

For the overall sample, participants reported an average of 21 pounds that they would need to lose to feel satisfied with their weight. "Normal weight" participants reported needing to lose an average of 8 pounds to feel satisfied while "overweight"

participants reported a significantly higher number: 21 pounds to feel satisfied. While not the main objective of this study, I find these numbers pretty staggering in terms of how prevalent body dissatisfaction was in this sample.

One limitation of this study is that “correlation does not equal causation” and it is unclear if the parents’ comments led to children gaining more weight and having higher adult BMIs or whether these participants also weighed more during childhood and their higher weight was the impetus for the parental comments on weight and eating behaviors. Nevertheless, this study highlights the potential negative impact of parental comments about weight and eating in an adult woman’s BMI and body satisfaction.

Reference: Wansink B, Latimer L, & Pope L (2016). “Don’t Eat So Much:” How Parent Comments Relate to Female Weight Satisfaction. *Eating and Weight Disorders*, Online Published June 6, 2016.