



# Perspectives on Generational Eating Behaviors and Learned Dieting

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## Introduction

A recent social media trend involves discussion of what it was like to grow up with an “Almond Mom.” This term is used to refer to a caregiver, typically a mother, who demonstrates what would often be defined as disordered eating behaviors (e.g., highly restrictive dieting, frequent use of body-shaming language).

Unsurprisingly, past studies have indicated that observed dieting behaviors of grandmothers and mothers are associated with increased dieting behavior and worsened body image among daughters.

Although growing in scope, existing research has rarely addressed the influence of caregivers on the body image and eating behaviors of children of varying gender identities. This lack of research may perpetuate the stereotype of eating disorders as a cisgender woman's issue.

## The Present Study

We conducted a study to better understand the relationship between caregiver eating behaviors and the eating behaviors and body image of their adult children. Furthermore, we were also interested in how recall of restrictive and critical caregiver messages about food would impact adult child body image across gender identities.

We tested the following hypotheses:

(1) Young adults with caregivers who displayed disordered eating behaviors will be more likely to report disordered eating and less likely to endorse adaptive eating behaviors.

(1a) The relationships will remain significant across genders.

(2) Recall of restrictive/critical caregiver eating messages will negatively predict body image flexibility.

(2a) The relationship will remain significant across genders.

## Methods

- WCU students ( $N = 314$ ) completed an online survey to answer questions about their own eating behaviors and body image, their caregivers' eating behaviors, and restrictive/critical messages received from their caregivers about their own eating.
- 62.4% identified as women, 32.2% identified as men, and 4.1% identified as non-binary (6.4% further identified as transgender). The majority (73.2%) identified as White. The average age was 18.97 years.

## Results

**Table 1. Correlation of Caregiver and Child Eating Behaviors**

Variable by Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
<b>Women (<math>n = 196</math>)</b>					
1. Disordered Eating	14.96	19.33	-		
2. Intuitive Eating	3.47	0.77	-.26**	-	
3. Caregiver Disordered Eating	41.49	19.37	.31**	-.29**	-
<b>Men (<math>n = 101</math>)</b>					
1. Disordered Eating	10.59	13.03	-		
2. Intuitive Eating	3.82	0.78	-.34**	-	
3. Caregiver Disordered Eating	36.36	17.72	.66**	-.39**	-
<b>Non-Binary (<math>n = 13</math>)</b>					
1. Disordered Eating	15.77	14.10	-		
2. Intuitive Eating	3.54	0.75	-.52	-	
3. Caregiver Disordered Eating	51.23	22.55	.59*	-.39	-

Note.  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$

**Table 2. Regression of Caregiver Eating Messages on Positive Body Image**

Variable by Gender	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
<b>Women</b>					
CEM	-.39	-.45**	-5.88	.08	.15
<b>Men</b>					
CEM	-.58	-.76**	-7.03	.11	.34
<b>Non-Binary</b>					
CEM	-.48	-.44**	-1.71	.26	.23

Note. CEM = caregiver eating messages  
 $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$

## Discussion

We conducted a study to improve understanding of the relationship of caregiver eating behaviors and messages with the eating behaviors and body image of their adult children. To build on existing research, we examined these relationships by gender.

We predicted that young adults with caregivers who displayed disordered eating behaviors will be more likely to report disordered eating and less likely to endorse adaptive eating behaviors. Results were as expected across both men and women, with significant correlations in predicted directions between these constructs.

We used linear regression to evaluate the extent to which caregiver restrictive and critical message frequency could predict body image across genders. For men, women, and non-binary participants, caregiver eating messages predicted a significant amount of the variance in body image flexibility scores.

The results of this study suggest that caregivers likely play an important role in the eating behaviors and body image of their adult children, regardless of gender identity. In the future, body image and eating behavior research should strive to be gender-inclusive. For example, a similar study with a larger representation of non-binary individuals is warranted.



## Further Information

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