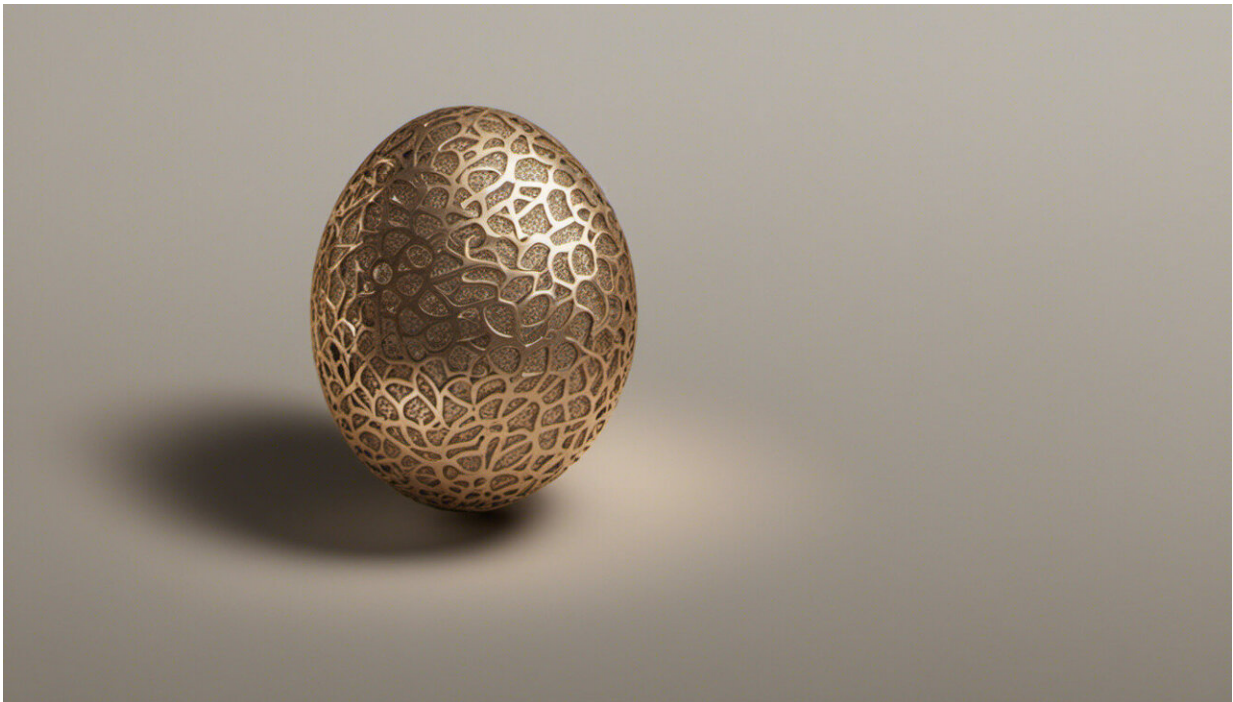


# How husbands perceive their wives' weight may affect later marriage satisfaction

November 25 2019, by Maggie Ward

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Husbands may want to pay careful attention to the messages they send about their wives' weight, according to new research that suggests a husband's perception of his wife being overweight may predict a decrease in her marital satisfaction.

In a study, Penn State researchers examined the relationship between whether people felt their spouses were overweight and their feelings about their marriage. They found that while husbands perceiving their wives as overweight predicted later decreases in wives' reports of marriage quality, the same was not true for when wives perceived their husbands as overweight.

According to the researchers, this pattern emerged even though men, on average, were less inclined than women to report that their spouse was overweight.

Anna Hochgraf, Prevention and Methodology Training Program (PAMT) predoctoral trainee at Penn State's Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, was the lead author of the paper, published recently in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

The study included a sample of 197 heterosexual married couples with adolescent-age children and data spanning a two-year period. At the time of the study, couples had been married an average of 18.6 years.

The researchers collected data at two points in time, one year apart. They measured marital satisfaction at both time points by asking the participants to fill out a seven-item questionnaire. The participants also reported whether they felt their spouse was overweight or not using a seven-point scale.

In addition to the initial results, the researchers found that 44 percent of women and 72 percent of men who reported height and [weight](#) would be classified as overweight or obese based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention BMI categories. These [gender differences](#) have special importance, according to Hochgraf.

"Research consistently indicates that women are more dissatisfied with

their weight than men," Hochgraf said. "This may be because of the different ideals of attractiveness for women and men as well as gender socialization processes that emphasize the importance of women's appearance."

Interestingly, although the majority of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, western ideals portray low body fat as a determining factor in physical attractiveness.

"Our findings suggest the importance of addressing weight concerns and discrediting the thin ideal of beauty in the context of interventions aimed at promoting positive couple relationships," Hochgraf said.

"Contemporary beauty ideals in the United States are unrealistic for most adults, so it's important to understand the implications of adults' weight concerns and perceptions of romantic partners' weight for relationship quality."

**More information:** Anna K. Hochgraf et al. Honey, do I look fat? Perceptions of spouses' weight and weight concerns predict marital relationship quality, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0265407519880961](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407519880961)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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