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[See table of contents](#)

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PEER SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS LIVING WITH SCOLIOSIS: FINDING A DIGITAL COMMUNITY

Marie Vigouroux^{1*}, Kristina Amja¹, Richard B. Hovey¹

1* Corresponding Author: Faculty of Dental Medicine and Oral Health Sciences, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
marie.vigouroux@mail.mcgill.ca

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INTRODUCTION: Scoliosis is a condition where a curve develops in the spine. Adolescent girls affected by scoliosis are significantly more likely to require treatment such as bracing or surgery than their male counterparts. Curvy Girls is a peer support group for adolescent girls with scoliosis that allows them to engage with each other in a safe environment.

OBJECTIVES: This study endeavours to explore the experiences of adolescent girls living with scoliosis who are Curvy Girls members and understand how this peer support group has affected their experience.

APPROACH: Sixteen participants were recruited through a senior board member of Curvy Girls. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using an applied philosophical hermeneutic approach, a practice of uncovering insights from transformational conversation.

FINDINGS: We found that the participants' sense of belonging to Curvy Girls did not depend on their level of involvement with the group. Whether they were leaders in their in-person local group, or simply following the organization on social media, seeing themselves represented allowed the participants to feel like they belonged to the group.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: These findings may help clinicians, healthcare professionals, and peer support organisations deepen their understanding of the perspectives of this specific population. This transformed understanding could lead to the instauration of care and services that are better adapted to this population's needs, resulting in lessening the burden of the condition on the individual and their support system. ■