Body Dissatisfaction as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Weight- and Appearance-Based Teasing and Disordered Eating Behaviors

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Introduction

- Weight- and appearance-based teasing are both independently associated with body dissatisfaction (Eisenberg, 2003; Keery, Boutelle, van den Berg & Thompson, 2005; Menzel, 2010) and disordered eating behaviors (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010).
- The relationship between body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors is well established (Polivy & Herman, 2002; Stice, 2002).
- However, there is a lack of research that explores the combined effects of weight- and appearance-based teasing.
- Furthermore, there is a dearth of research that simultaneously examines the relationship between weight- and appearance-based teasing, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors.
- Much of the existing research on weight- or appearance-based teasing has been conducted with adolescents (Eisenberg, 2003; Keery, Boutelle, van den Berg & Thompson, 2005), or examined the impact of childhood weight-teasing history on disordered eating behaviors in adulthood (Sweetingham & Waller, 2008).
- Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to examine the role of body dissatisfaction in the relationship between weight- and appearance-based teasing and disordered eating behaviors, in a sample of young adults.

Hypotheses

- It was predicted that weight- and appearance-based teasing would be associated with:
  1. increased bulimic symptoms (e.g., binging and purging), and that
  2. this relationship will be mediated by body dissatisfaction.

Method

Participants

- Participants included 138 undergraduates at Simon Fraser University ($M_{age} = 19.08$; $SD = 1.69$; 71% female) from ethnically diverse backgrounds (40.6% Caucasian, 44.9% Asian, and 14.4% other).
- Participants had an average BMI of 23.78 ($SD = 7.77$).

Self-Report Measures

- Project EAT Survey (Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Guo, Story, Haines, & Eisenberg, 2006):
  - Unhealthy weight control behaviors:
    - Have you done any of the following things in order to lose weight or keep from gaining weight during the past year? (Yes or No)
    - See Table 1 for measured disordered eating behaviors.
  - Binge eating with loss of control:
    - (1) In the past year, have you ever eaten so much food in a short period of time that you would be embarrassed if others saw you (binge-eating)? (Yes or No)
    - (2) During the times when you ate this way, did you feel you couldn’t stop eating or control what or how much you were eating? (Yes or No)
  - Eating Disorder Inventory-3 ( Garner, 2004): Bulimic symptoms (8 items) and body dissatisfaction (10 items).

Data Analysis

- Linear regressions were conducted to examine whether weight- and appearance-based teasing were predictive of bulimic symptoms.
- Sobel test was used to determine whether body dissatisfaction mediated the aforementioned relationship.

Results

- Weight- and appearance-based teasing were associated with bulimic symptoms, $\beta = 1.40$, $p < 0.01$.

Body Dissatisfaction as a Mediator

- Once body dissatisfaction was added to the model, body dissatisfaction was a significant predictor of predicted bulimic symptoms, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$.
- However, weight- and appearance-based teasing remained a significant predictor in the model, $\beta = 0.91$, $p < 0.05$.
- See Figure 1 for the mediation model.

Conclusion

- This study’s results indicate that an association between weight- and appearance-based teasing and bulimic symptoms still exist, even after controlling for the effects of body dissatisfaction.
- These findings illuminate the need for further research to identify mechanisms by which teasing affects disordered eating behaviors.
- These findings also extend previous research on weight- and appearance-based teasing and disordered eating behaviors to a sample of young adults.
- As only bulimic behaviors were explored in the present study, future research should explore the effects of teasing and body dissatisfaction on anorexic behaviors and cognitions.

Table 1. Frequency of Disordered Eating Behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercised</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ate very little food</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped meals</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge eating with loss of control</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used food substitute (powder/special drink)</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took diet pills</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made myself vomit (throw up)</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used diuretics (water pills)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used laxatives</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Mean (SD) of Primary Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight &amp; Appearance Teasing</td>
<td>1.84 (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI-3: Bulimia</td>
<td>4.12 (4.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI-3: Body Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>12.88 (8.10)</td>
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