Self-Esteem and Body Shame: Paths from Appearance Pressures to Disordered Eating

Although social pressures from family and from peers are a well-established risk factor, particularly for women, for developing disordered eating thoughts and behaviors, the exact mechanisms by which they do so remains unclear. Body shame and low self-esteem are other variables that are separately correlated with disordered eating thoughts and behaviors. This study investigated the relationships between social pressures to conform to an appearance ideal, body shame, self-esteem, and disordered eating in a sample of undergraduate women. Results supported a mediation model wherein the indirect effects of social pressures from both peers and family on disordered eating were mediated entirely by body shame. While low self-esteem was correlated separately with both social pressures and disordered eating, it did not mediate the effects of either type of social pressure on disordered eating. Results suggest body shame may be an effective target for intervention to attenuate the effects of social pressures to conform to an appearance ideal.