# Examining Mediators of the Relation Between Self-Concept Clarity and Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating

## *Senior Honors Thesis* – **Peyton Jayne Kelly**

## Introduction

- Body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are critical issues that negatively impact mental health in our society.
- Body dissatisfaction has consistently proven to be a robust risk factor for and determinant of the development and maintenance of eating disorders.
- While existing eating disorder treatments can be effective, high relapse rates indicate the need to pursue new avenues.
- Preliminary research demonstrates that self-concept clarity, appearance contingent self-worth, and appearance-related social comparison are correlated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.
- This study seeks to examine how constructs related to evaluations of the self are linked to eating pathology.

### Key Variables

**Self-concept clarity (SCC):** extent that one's self-concept is clearly & confidently defined, internally consistent, & stable over time (*SCSS; Campbell et al., 1996*)

**Appearance contingent self-worth (ACSW):** the degree to which one believes their self-worth is dependent upon their appearance/attractiveness (*appearance subscale of Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale; Crocker et al., 2003*)

**Appearance-related social comparison (ARSC):** (*Body Comparison Orientation subscale of the BEECOM; Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012*)

**Body dissatisfaction (BD):** negative self-perceptions and attitudes about one's own body (*EDE-Q Weight Concern & Shape Concern combined subscales; Fairburn & Beglin, 2008*)

**Disordered eating (DE):** encompassing a range of eating pathology including behaviors like dietary restriction & binge eating, & attitudes like preoccupation with food or being thinner(*EAT-26; Garner et al., 1982*)

## Aims

1. Examine correlations between key variables (Time 1 data)
   - Predictors: SCC, ACSW, & ARSC
   - Outcomes: BD & DE
   - Hypotheses:
     - SCC will be **significantly negatively correlated** with BD & ED
     - ACSW will be **significantly positively correlated** with BD & DE
     - ARSC will be **significantly positively correlated** with BD & DE

2. Examine 4 mediation models (Time 1 & Time 2 data)
   - Predictor: SCC (Time 1)
   - Mediators: ACSW or ARSC (Time 1)
   - Outcomes: BD or DE (Time 2)
   - Hypotheses:
     - Low SCC will predict greater BD (**model 1**) & DE (**model 2**) by increasing ACSW
     - Low SCC will predict greater BD (**model 3**) & DE (**model 4**) by increasing ARSC

### Participant Demographics

**Age** = 18.71 years
**BMI** = 22.39 kg/m$^2$
**SES** (highest parental education) = 17.01 years
**Race:** White (73.2%); Black (9.1%); Hispanic/Latinx (8.0%); Asian (5.0%); Pacific Islander (0.2%), other (0.2%); multiple (4.3%)

### Retention

**Time 1** (*N* = 441)

|

*approx. 14 months*

↓

**Time 2** (*N* = 237)

## Aim 1 Results

SCC was **negatively correlated** with BD & DE:

self-concept is clearly/confidently defined, internally consistent, & stable over time  ⟶  **less** body dissatisfaction & disordered eating
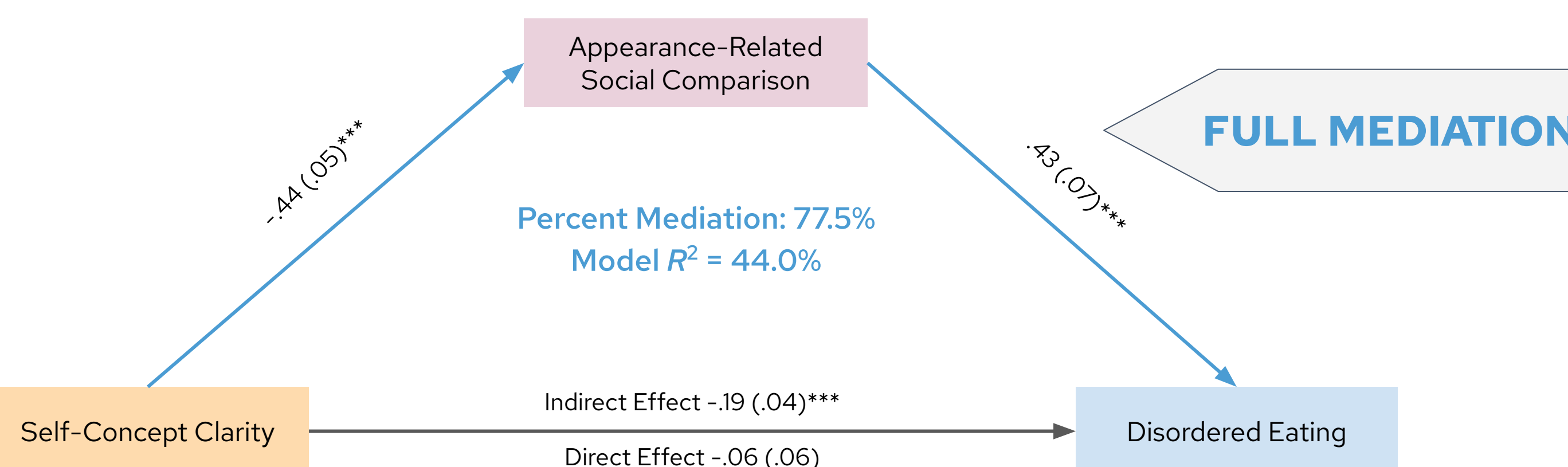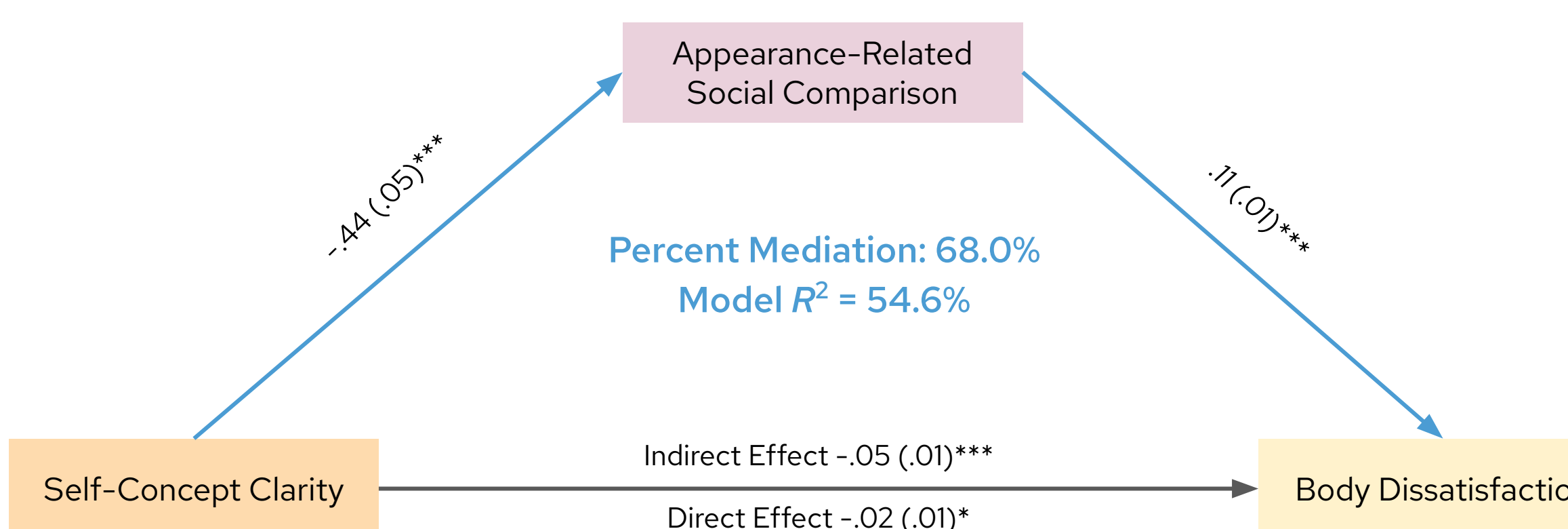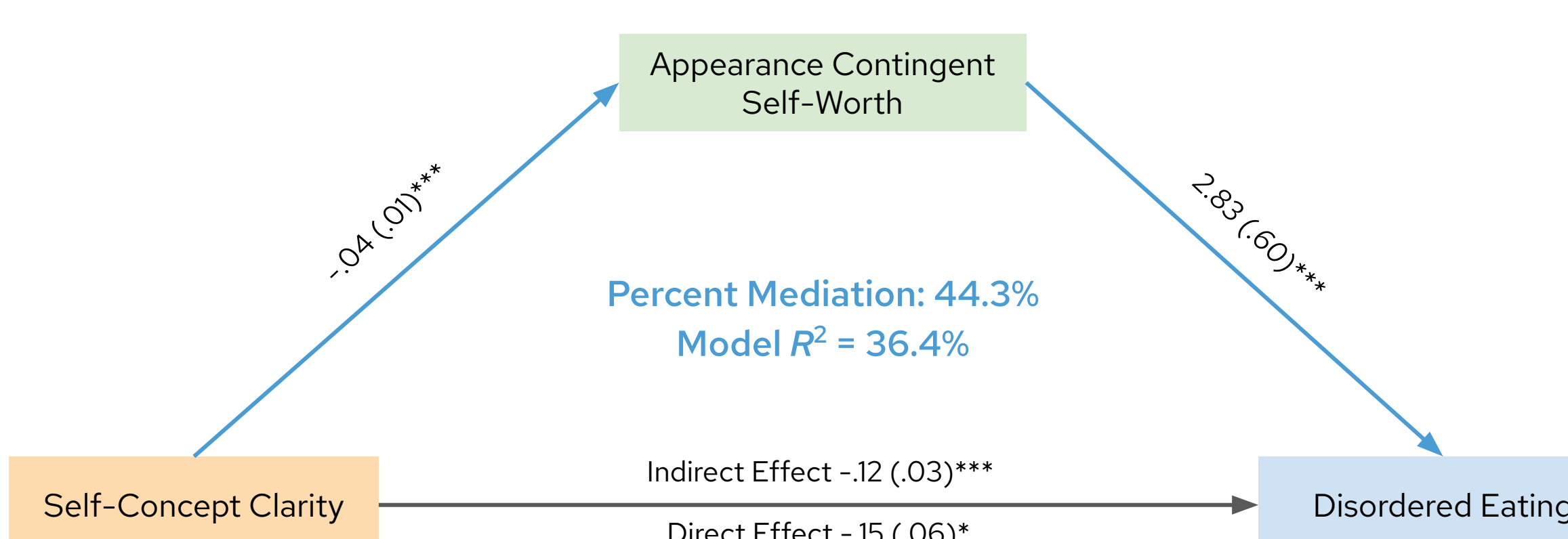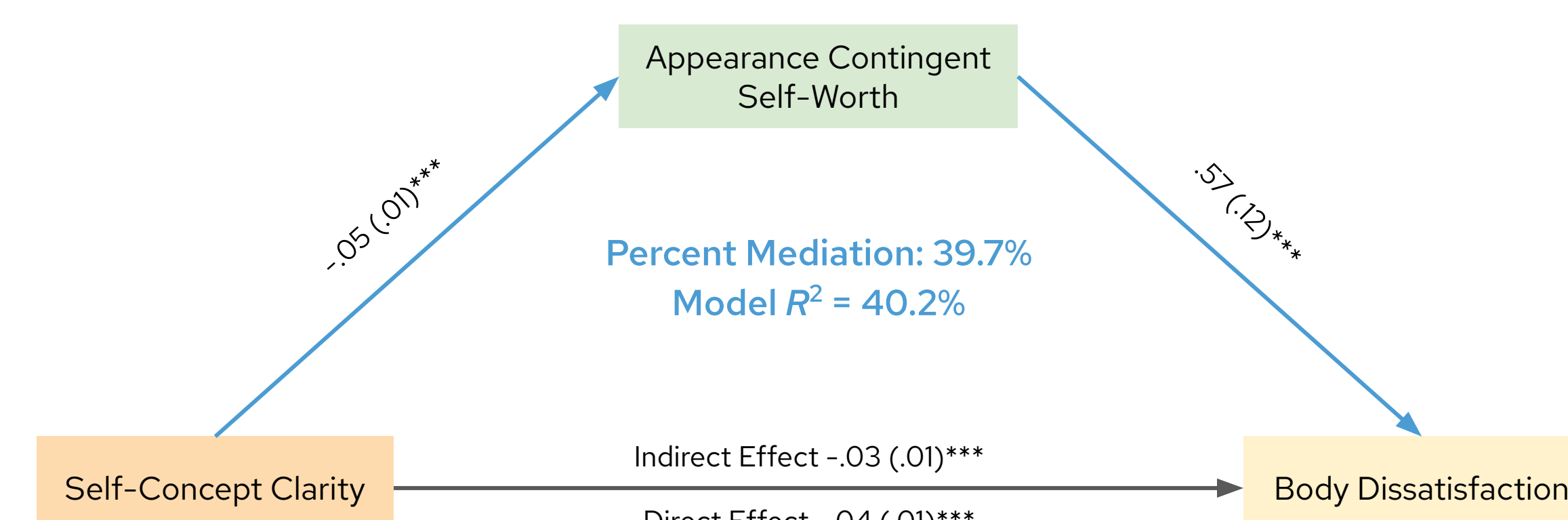
ACSW was **positively correlated** with BD & DE:

self-worth is **highly** dependent on appearance/attractiveness  ⟶  **more** body dissatisfaction & disordered eating

ARSC was **positively correlated** with BD & DE:

**a lot** of comparisons made between appearance of self and others  ⟶  **more** body dissatisfaction & disordered eating

## Aim 2 Results



Appearance Contingent Self-Worth
.05 (.01)*** | .57 (.12)***
Percent Mediation: 39.7%
Model $R^2$ = 40.2%
Self-Concept Clarity | Indirect Effect -.03 (.01)*** | Direct Effect -.04 (.01)*** | Body Dissatisfaction

Appearance Contingent Self-Worth
-.04 (.01)*** | 2.83 (.60)***
Percent Mediation: 44.3%
Model $R^2$ = 36.4%
Self-Concept Clarity | Indirect Effect -.12 (.03)*** | Direct Effect -.15 (.06)* | Disordered Eating

Appearance-Related Social Comparison
-.44 (.05)*** | .11 (.01)***
Percent Mediation: 68.0%
Model $R^2$ = 54.6%
Self-Concept Clarity | Indirect Effect -.05 (.01)*** | Direct Effect -.02 (.01)* | Body Dissatisfaction

Appearance-Related Social Comparison
-.44 (.05)*** | .43 (.07)*** | **FULL MEDIATION**
Percent Mediation: 77.5%
Model $R^2$ = 44.0%
Self-Concept Clarity | Indirect Effect -.19 (.04)*** | Direct Effect -.06 (.06) | Disordered Eating

*Note. * p < .05, *** p < .001*

## Discussion

- To our knowledge, this is the first study examining appearance contingent self-worth and appearance-related social comparison as mediators of the relationship between self-concept clarity and both body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.
- Aim 1 provided descriptive statistics through correlations among core constructs—as predicted, all correlations were statistically significant and demonstrated the expected relationships.
- Aim 2 focused on testing 4 novel mediation models of self-concept clarity's effect on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. As predicted, both mediators at least partially mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and body dissatisfaction/disordered eating.
  - Overall, appearance-related social comparison appears to be the stronger of the 2 mediators. Most strikingly, results indicate that appearance-related social comparison fully mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and disordered eating, suggesting that low self-concept clarity predicts greater disordered eating by increasing appearance-related social comparison.
- Findings suggest that targeting appearance contingent self-worth and appearance-related social comparison—pathways between low self-concept clarity and eating disorder symptoms—in prevention and treatment efforts may mitigate risk for the development, increase, or relapse of disordered eating.
- More research is necessary to determine if the effects are generalizable to a broader population and determine if interventions explicitly designed to target key variables would effectively reduce body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in clinical populations.
  - Future research should examine relationship contingent self-worth and other areas of social comparison.
  - Between prior research and the current study, 4 mediators of the examined relationship have been identified—future work should use complex models to jointly examine these mediators and decipher the most robust pathways.

### Acknowledgments

Anna Bardone-Cone, PhD, FAED
Patrick Harrison, PhD
Alexandra (Ale) Miller, MA

### Contact Info

**Email:** pjkelly123@gmail.com
**Lab Website:** https://bardonecone.web.unc.edu/

### References

(Bardone-Cone et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 1996; Crocker et al., 2003; Fairburn & Beglin, 2008; Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012; Garner et al., 1982; National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2021; Vartanian et al., 2016)