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

**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 disordered eating, and 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): the extent that one’s self-concept is clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable over time (SCS; Campbell et al., 1998)

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)

**Aims**

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

2. Examine 4 mediation models (Time 1 & Time 2 data)
   - Predictor: SCC (Time 1)
   - Mediators: ACSW & ARSC (Time 1)
   - Outcomes: BD & DE (Time 2)
   - Hypotheses:
     - Low SCC will predict greater BD & DE (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/m²
- 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**

- 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 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**

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**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)