

The Role of Mindfulness in Poor Body Image and Disordered Eating

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Vulnerability During College Years

- The college years represent a time of transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).
- This transition may be accompanied by decreases in physical activity and increases in weight gain (Nelson, Story, Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Lytle, 2008).
- It may also lead to problems with disordered eating (Mazzeo, 1998).

Risk Factors for Disordered Eating

- Genetics
- Gender
- Internalization of thin ideal
- Body Image

Poor Body Image and Disordered Eating

- College women are especially vulnerable to body image concerns, which have been associated with increased levels of disordered eating (Mazzeo, 1999).
 - ◆ 40-60% of college women engage in some form of disordered eating (Krahn et al, 2005; Berg et al, 2009).
 - ◆ Among women of the same age, college students report more disordered eating behavior than non college students (Rand & Kuldau, 1991).
- However, all women with poor body image do not go on to develop an eating disorder, which may be due to protective factors, such as mindfulness.

Mindfulness, Body Image, and Disordered Eating

→ The act of being accepting and aware of the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

→ Has been associated with:

- ◆ More positive body image in college women, controlling for negative affect and BMI (Lavender et al, 2012; Stewart, 2004).
- ◆ Fewer bulimic symptoms and overall disordered eating symptoms in college women (Lavender et al, 2011; Lavender et al, 2009).

Mindfulness-Based Treatments

→ Associated with psychological and physiological benefits:

- ◆ Mindfulness-based treatment for poor body image (Stewart, 2004)
- ◆ Mindfulness for treatment of binge eating disorder (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999)
- ◆ Therapies like DBT with mindfulness based components - used to treat bulimia nervosa (Safer et al., 2001)

The Current Study

Examine the influence of mindfulness on the well-established relation between body image and disordered eating attitudes in young women transitioning to college.

Methods

→ Participants:

- ◆ 558 college women from a midwestern urban university (Mean age= 18.5, SD=0.44)
- ◆ 73.2% Caucasian, 13.7% Asian, 4.4% Hispanic, 2.2% Black, 6.5% Other

→ Measures:

- ◆ **Body Image** - Appearance Evaluation subscale of the Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (Brown et al, 1990; Cash, 2000)
- ◆ **Disordered Eating** - Eating Attitudes Test – 12 item version (Lavik, Clausen, & Pedersen, 1991) - adapted from long-form Eating Attitudes Test-40 (Garner & Garfinkle, 1979)
- ◆ **Mindfulness** - Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

→ Procedure:

- ◆ Assessed each measure at the beginning of the first year of college and at the end of the first year of college (secondary data analysis, part of a larger study of mental health and well-being in college students (IMPACT))

Statistics

→ Hierarchical linear regression

- ◆ Body image and mindfulness in the beginning of first year (Time 1) as predictors of disordered eating attitudes at the end of first year (Time 2)
- ◆ Controlling for Time 1 disordered eating attitudes, BMI, and negative affect (DASS).

→ Post-hoc probing for interactions

- ◆ Body image as a predictor of disordered eating attitudes at high and low levels of mindfulness.

Results

	Total Possible Score	Sample Mean	Sample SD
Body Image (Appearance Evaluation)	35	23.78	6.04
Disordered Eating Attitudes	36	4.62	5.63
Mindfulness	90	64.07	13.05

Results

Predictors of Disordered Eating Attitudes at the end of first year (controlling for Time 1 disordered eating, BMI, and negative affect)

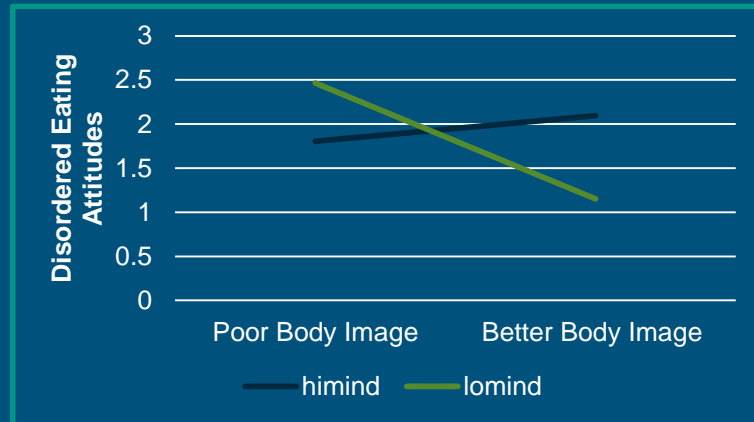
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Body Image	.05
Mindfulness	.69

All p 's > .05

Results

→ Mindfulness buffered the relation between poor body image and disordered eating attitudes:

- ◆ Among women with poor body image, high levels of mindfulness were associated with lower levels of disordered eating attitudes.



Implications and Future Directions

→ Mindfulness as Treatment:

- ◆ Future interventions targeting poor body image among college women might be improved by including mindfulness components.

→ Mindfulness as Prevention:

- ◆ “Normative discontent” of poor body image among women.
- ◆ Teaching mindfulness strategies as coping mechanisms that may work before disordered eating is developed.

Future Directions

- Examine trajectories of body image and disordered eating attitudes across the college years
- Evaluate this moderation holds during different years of college, or if freshman year is a particularly important time period
- Trait vs. state mindfulness - can this be taught? What are the most successful ways?
- What about men?

Thank You!

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