Social Anxiety and Body Image Disorders: What Role Does Social Appearance Anxiety Play?
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Abstract

Introduction: Social anxiety and eating disorders are highly comorbid (Kaye et al., 2004). However it is unknown how specific domains of social anxiety relate to eating dysfunction. We sought to examine these relationships and investigate social appearance anxiety as a vulnerability linking social anxiety with the eating disorders.

Method: We examined five domains of social anxiety (social interaction anxiety, fear of scrutiny, fear of positive/negative evaluation, social appearance anxiety) and seven components of eating dysfunction (body dissatisfaction, bulimia, drive for thinness, weight/shape/eating concern, and restraint).

Results/Discussion: We found support for a model in which social appearance anxiety and fear of negative evaluation of one's appearance are vulnerabilities for both social anxiety and eating disorders. Interventions that target social appearance anxiety may help prevent eating disorders.

Introduction

- Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is significantly more common among individuals with eating disorders (Goddard et al., 2000)
- Studies indicate that the onset of anxiety disorders precedes development of eating disorders (Brewerton et al., 1995)
- General fear of negative evaluation (FNE) has been suggested to link SAD with eating disorders
- SAD literature FNE is treated as a cause of (or vulnerability to) SAD
- Social appearance anxiety (SAA) is a factor in the development of eating disorders
- Social appearance anxiety may prevent development of eating disorders

Participants

- 95 undergraduates at Washington University
- Participants were mostly female (n = 62; 65%)
- Mostly white (n = 66; 70%)
- Mean age of 19 (M = 19.34, SD = 1.16)

Methods

- Social Anxiety Scale (SAS; Hart et al., 2008)
  - Contains 16 items regarding anxiety about one’s appearance in social situations
  - SAS demonstrates a unifactorial structure with high test-retest reliability

- Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) has been associated with social anxiety and is a unique predictor of social anxiety over and above body image measures

- Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)
  - Describes anxiety-related reactions to a variety of social situations
  - Good to excellent reliability, and good construct and convergent validity

- Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)
  - Describes anxiety about one’s appearance (body dissatisfaction, bulimia, drive for thinness, weight/shape/eating concern, and restraint)

- Fear of positive evaluation (FPE; Weeks et al., 2008)
  - Good to excellent reliability and ability to discriminate between social phobia and other disorders

- Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPE; Weeks et al., 2008)
  - Measures fear of being negatively evaluated
  - Excellent psychometric properties when the reverse-scored items are excluded, as they are here

- Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE; Leary, 1983)
  - Brief version of the original FNE

- Eating Disorder Inventory-2 (EDI-2; Garner, 1983)
  - Measures social appearance anxiety were vulnerabilities for SAD and EDD had more social anxiety and FNE were vulnerabilities for SAD and EDD had more social anxiety

- Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q; Fairburn & Beglin, 1994)
  - Measures four subscales from the EDE

- Body dissatisfaction, bulimia, drive for thinness, weight/shape/eating concern

Analyses

- Structural equation modeling was implemented using the maximum likelihood estimator in the Mplus program Version 5.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2009)
- Model fit was evaluated using:
  - Comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990)
  - Tucker-Lewis incremental fit index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973)
  - Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980)
  - To test which domains of social anxiety related to each specific component of EDD we conducted follow up tests for each of the seven components

Results

- Multiple Regression Analyses:
  - Social appearance anxiety (part r = .44, p < .001) significantly predicted EDD over and above social interaction anxiety (part r = -.11, p = .314), fear of scrutiny (part r = -.09, p = .415) and fear of positive evaluation (part r = .14, p = .211)
  - To test which domains of social anxiety related to each specific component of EDD we conducted follow up tests for each of the seven components

Discussion

- Social anxiety and body image disorders: What role does social appearance anxiety play?

- To test a model in which SAD and EDD were vulnerabilities for both social anxiety and EDD and fear of positive evaluation was a vulnerability for social anxiety alone

For samples of fewer than 200 cases, RMSEA has been found to be an underestimate of model fit (i.e., in a larger sample the fit may improve; Curran et al., 2003)