Abstract

Introduction: Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is highly comorbid with body image disorders and obesity (Chou, 2009). A core component of SAD is fear of negative evaluation (FNE) (Haikal & Hong, 2010).

Method: We examined the relationship between health variables (BMI, body fat content), drive for muscularity, and social anxiety.

Results/Discussion: Fear of negative evaluation and social appearance anxiety had a unique relationship with the health variables over and above other social fears. Negative evaluation fears may have a specific relationship with obesity and body image disorders.

Hypotheses

1) SAA, FNE, and gender would predict body fat content and BMI over and above other social fears (social interaction anxiety and fear of scrutiny)
2) FNE would interact with gender to predict DFMusc
3) SAA would interact with gender to predict DFMusc

Participants

•118 undergraduates
  • Mostly female (n = 73; 62%)
  • Mostly white (n = 84; 71%)
  • Mean age of about 19 (M = 19.31, SD = 1.20)

Measures

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS; Hart et al., 2008)
  • Contains 16 items regarding anxiety about one’s appearance in social situations
  • Demonstrates a unifactorial structure
  • Positively associated with measures of social anxiety
  • Is a unique predictor of social anxiety over and above body image measures

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE; Leary, 1983)
  • Brief version of the original FNE (Watson & Clark, 1969)
  • Measures fear of being negatively evaluated
  • Fear of negative evaluation is hypothesized to be a core component of SAD

Social Phobia Scale (SPS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)
  • 17-item measure of anxiety-related reactions to social situations

Drive for Muscularity Scale (DFMusc; McCreary & Sasse, 2000)
  • 15-item measure of drive for muscularity
  • Assumes an individual’s desire to increase their muscularity

Multiple Regression Analyses: Body Fat Content & Body Mass Index

• SAA (part r = .26, p = .006), FNE (part r = .21, p = .038), and gender (part r = -.46, p < .001) significantly predicted body fat content over and social interaction anxiety (part r = -.08, p = .556) and fear of scrutiny (part r = .13, p = .212)
• SAA (part r = .21, p = .030) and gender (part r = .26, p = .007) were the only significant predictors of BMI (all ps > .445)

Results

Note. SAA = Social Appearance Anxiety; DFM = Drive for Muscularity.

Discussion

• SAA and FNE may have a specific impact on obesity and body image
• High levels of FNE and SAA may lead to drive for muscularity in men, which may in turn lead to body image disorders or maladaptive behaviors (e.g., steroid use)
• Future research should explore these relationships in a longitudinal design to provide evidence on causality
• Interventions that address FNE and SAA may help prevent the development of obesity and body image disorders