Presentation Title

Is Body Dissatisfaction Changing Across Time? A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis

Abstract

Body dissatisfaction is one of the most widely recognized and robust predictors of eating-related pathologies, as well as depressive symptomatology. Yet, it remains unclear whether body dissatisfaction is consistent across cohorts and time, which is important to investigate because dominant theories propose sociocultural influences, which may be transient, play an important role in the development of body dissatisfaction. Previous efforts for tracking body dissatisfaction across cohorts and time are limited by relying on data from a single institution or using measures of body dissatisfaction that lack psychometric support with the sample being assessed. In this study, we utilized cross-temporal meta-analytic analyses to examine changes in two dimensions of body dissatisfaction across time: thinness-oriented dissatisfaction as assessed with the Eating Disorder Inventory-Body Dissatisfaction subscale (data available across 31 years from 332 unique samples, n = 101,460 participants) and muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction as measured with the Drive for Muscularity Scale (data available across 14 years from 118 unique samples, n = 23,846 participants). Results revealed a significant interaction between year of study and gender in predicting thinness-oriented dissatisfaction: females scored higher than men consistently, although only females' scores decreased gradually across time. Males scored consistently higher than females on muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction, with no significant change across time. These patterns remained when controlling for age and geographic location. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of considering multiple dimensions of body dissatisfaction in research and offer evidence that sociocultural shifts in body acceptance and diversity may be countering thinness-related pressures for girls and women.