

EATING DISORDERS AND BODY IMAGE OF UNDERGRADUATE MALES

ABSTRACT

Eating disorders and body dissatisfaction among undergraduate males are less documented and researched than are eating disorders and body dissatisfaction among undergraduate females. Thus, the extant literature is unclear regarding similarities and differences in body-image issues as expressed in undergraduate males versus undergraduate females. The purpose of this study was to examine body-image issues in undergraduate males and undergraduate females in order to identify similarities and differences between males and females vis-à-vis such issues. In a random sample of undergraduates, respondents were categorized by gender and by presence or absence of an eating disorder. Undergraduate males with an eating disorder were compared to: 1) undergraduate females with an eating disorder, and 2) undergraduate males without an eating disorder. Patterns of responses suggest that undergraduate males with an eating disorder are preoccupied with body shape and tone, but are not necessarily preoccupied with weight. Implications for future prevention as well as clinical and research efforts based on male symptoms within the diagnostic category of EDNOS are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition - Text Revision 1 (DSM-IV-TR), for every ten individuals who are anorexic or bulimic, nine are females and only one is male. The low rates of eating disorders in men as defined by the DSM-IV-TR most likely have influenced Western society's view of disordered eating as a woman's issue. Indeed, most research on disordered eating and body dissatisfaction has included "women only" review samples. The exclusion of men from empirical studies of eating pathology has led to a lack of knowledge about men's eating patterns and body image.

Studies focused on men have produced mixed findings regarding the clinical picture presented by males in comparison to females with respect to eating problems and body dissatisfaction. Some evidence suggests that men, including college men, who struggle with eating pathology or are diagnosed with an eating disorder exhibit maladaptive eating-related behaviors and attitudes similar to those found in women. Other data indicate that males diet for reasons different than those that motivate females to diet. These studies indicate that men appear motivated to diet by a drive for muscle rather than the drive for thinness that is often seen in females. For example, the Neumark-Sztainer et al study of adolescent boys and girls found that fewer moderately overweight boys than girls perceived themselves as such. Additionally, fewer average weight boys than girls perceived themselves as overweight. In fact, almost half of the average-weight boys in this study actually wanted to weigh more. Data from this and related research are that males are less concerned with making their bodies smaller than are females, and that males strive to become bigger and more muscular.

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomena of eating disorders and body image in college men. It was hypothesized that

college men would display different patterns of body image concerns than college women. In particular, it was thought that college men who met the criteria for an eating disorder diagnosis would demonstrate less preoccupation with weight and more preoccupation with muscle tone than do college women with eating disorders. Additionally, it was hypothesized that these fixations would be present more often in college men with an eating disorder than in college men without an eating disorder.