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Fear of negative appearance evaluation: Development and evaluation of a new construct for risk factor work in the field of eating disorders

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Abstract

The psychometric properties and correlates of a measure designed to assess fear of negative appearance evaluation are presented. In Study 1, 165 college females completed the Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale [FNAES; Thomas, C.M., Keery, H., Williams, R., & Thompson, J. K. (1998, November). The Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale: Development and preliminary validation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Washington, DC] along with measures of body image, eating disturbance, and depression. Results replicated previous analyses indicating the presence of a single factor, good internal consistency, and significant association with measures of body image and eating disturbance. Additionally, the FNAES accounted for unique variance beyond that explained by general fear of negative evaluation, and other measures of body image and eating disturbance, in the prediction of body shape dysphoria, dietary restraint, and trait anxiety. Study 2 further examined the validity of the FNAES, finding it to correlate significantly with measures of social physique anxiety, body image, eating attitude, and mood. The FNAES did not significantly correlate with body mass index (BMI). Regression analyses found the FNAES to predict levels of body image, eating attitude, and mood beyond variance explained by social physique anxiety. The FNAES appears to measure a conceptually unique aspect

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of body image that has not been indexed by previous measures and may serve a useful role in risk factor and preventive work.

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1. Introduction

Recent work in the areas of body image disturbance and eating disorders has focused on the delineation of risk factors that may lead to the onset and maintenance of these clinical problems (Thompson & Smolak, 2001; Thompson & Stice, 2001). A variety of disparate influences have received research attention, including such interpersonal and sociocultural factors as negative appearance-related feedback (teasing), modeling of dieting and body image concerns by parents and peers, elevated tendencies to compare one's appearance to others, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and internalization of media images and messages (Shisslak & Crago, 2001; Stice, 2001). One potential variable that may serve to increase the vulnerability of individuals to develop eating and shape-related problems is a fear of negative appearance evaluation by others. A more global FNE has been a fruitful concept for examination for many years (Watson & Friend, 1969) and led to considerable empirical and theoretical work. The more specific fear of negative *appearance* evaluation also has the potency to extend recent work in the measurement of factors associated with, and potentially causal of, body image and eating problems.

Prior work in this area is limited to Thomas, Keery, Williams, and Thompson's (1998) exploratory work, which yielded an eight-item measure of negative appearance evaluation. In a single sample of 272 women, they found the presence of a unitary factor with a high internal consistency (.91) and good convergence with measures of body image and internalization of media images/messages, but little relationship to teasing history. To date, no work has followed up this preliminary analysis of the fear of negative appearance evaluation variable. The current series of studies was designed specifically to build on this initial study, with the intent of determining if the fear of negative appearance evaluation could offer unique predictive ability, beyond traditional measures, in explaining variance associated with body image and eating disturbance.

Accordingly, Study 1 was designed to further evaluate and cross-validate the initial FNAES developed by Thomas et al. (1998) in a sample from a geographically different region of the country (New York vs. Florida, site of the original study). In addition, in order to systematically replicate the earlier study, a different set of measures was used for convergent validity analyses. Finally, specific regressions were used to determine if fear of negative appearance evaluation accounted for unique variance in the prediction of disturbance variables beyond that accounted for by global FNE [as measured by the standard instrument in the field, the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE), Watson & Friend, 1969].

Study 2 further examined the validity of the measure. Correlational analyses tested the convergent validity with additional measures of body image, eating attitude and behavior, mood, and self-esteem. An important goal of Study 2 was to determine the association of fear of negative appearance evaluation with the measure it appeared to be conceptually closest to replicating, social

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