

## Special Series: Body Dissatisfaction, Binge Eating, and Dieting as Interlocking Issues in Eating Disorders Research

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This series will expose the reader to current issues in eating disorders research. It begins with an examination of the roots of body dissatisfaction in childhood. The series then considers direct treatment of body dissatisfaction and explores patterns underlying binge eating, a correlate of body dissatisfaction. Two clinical weight control programs are described, one focusing specifically on reducing binge eating and the other examining the effects of a very low calorie (400-500 kcal/day) diet on dietary lapses. Six empirical articles thus extend the literature in this rapidly growing area. The seventh and final article responds to the current debate about dieting by reviewing relevant empirical findings and arguing for the utility of behaviorally based programs. This series shows the range of issues within this area, as well as considering the interlocking nature of body dissatisfaction, bingeing, rigid dieting attitudes, and clinical obesity treatment programs.

Serendipity can be a wonderful thing. Special series of articles afford the reader the luxury of being able to sample the depth and breadth of a given research area; in this case, the broad area of eating disorders. However, in most cases, special series are not composed of data-based papers, as most laboratories cannot yield data to fit a publication timetable. The following set of articles form an exception to the rule. These papers consider many of the different facets of eating disorders and obesity currently being explored, and provide a sampling of approaches to understanding the relationship among dissatisfaction with body size, bingeing, subjective calorie restricting, and clinical obesity treatments. None of these articles were invited; they were all rigorously peer reviewed during the last year and all met the high standards of *Behavior Therapy*. Yet, their submission at the same time is not entirely serendipitous; it documents the burgeoning of research in this area. The first six articles in the series are data-based reports and the seventh is a conceptual review that effectively synthesizes many of the concerns raised in the earlier articles about the role of dieting in psychological and physical health.

As will be seen, one common theme within this literature is the potential for a cyclical relationship among a desire to be thinner, strict subjective rules about eating that result in both hunger and abstinence violation effects (e.g., "I've blown it now, I might as well eat the whole thing"), and weight gain.

How early does this process start? Thelen and Cormier (1995) report on fourth grade girls who already show a desire to be thinner than they are. Many of these fourth grade children, both boys and girls, are already engaging in dieting with both their mothers' and fathers' encouragement. Furthermore, girls' dieting, even independent of their actual body weight, was related to their fathers' encouragement of weight control. Thelen and Cormier explore the relationship between mothers' and fathers' own weight and weight control behaviors and their children's dieting and desire to be thinner. Their work sets the stage for an understanding of the extent to which dissatisfaction with one's body is influenced by communication and modeling processes within families.

By adulthood, a quarter of all men and nearly half of all women are dieting (Williamson, Serdula, Anda, Levy, & Byers, 1992). An even higher proportion feel that they are overweight (Horm & Anderson, 1993). In the next paper in this series, Grant and Cash (1995) document that negative body image is not only associated with disorders such as social anxiety and depression, but that it underlies most eating disorders. Targeting a group of women without current eating disorders or severe obesity, Grant and Cash demonstrate the utility of a cognitive behavioral approach to body-image dissatisfaction. This study contrasted group therapy versus a self-directed approach and describes not only the direct effects, but also generalized positive influence on self-esteem, social anxiety, and depression.

The negative effects of body-image dissatisfaction appear more intensely in overweight individuals. The next paper in the series, by Rosen, Orosan, and Reiter (1995), describes a cognitive behavioral treatment for negative body image with subjects who were, on the average, more than 50% over their ideal body weight. This entire population had histories of repeated dieting, and 20% met diagnostic criteria for binge eating disorder. Rosen et al. consider the changes their program yielded in body image dissatisfaction, as well as the absence of negative side effects (e.g., improved body image was not associated with weight gain) and the presence of generalized positive outcomes including increased self-esteem, reduced guilt over eating, and reduced overeating.

Understanding the motivation underlying problematic behaviors such as overeating is challenging. Although it is clear that body dissatisfaction often accompanies the gamut of eating disorders, from simple overeating to binge eating, and from purging to obesity, the critical links between affective and cognitive reactions to one's body and eating have not been identified. As one example, the extent to which dieting leads to excessive rebound eating is unclear. The next three papers consider this issue in very different ways. Johnson, Schlundt, Barclay, Carr-Nangle, and Engler (1995) describe a functional analysis for binge eating in which patterns of eating within binge eating disordered individuals, individuals with subclinical binge eating, and normal control subjects are examined. They show that all three types of subjects binge eat in response to negative emotions (although binge eating disordered subjects were more susceptible to this), but only control subjects listed positive emotions (e.g., a celebration in a restaurant) as another setting event for bingeing. Most interestingly, rather than a binge decreasing the probability that the next eating occasion will be a binge, one binge more than doubled the probability

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