



## Relationship of negative self-schemas and attachment styles with appearance schemas

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 27 August 2009

Received in revised form 22 January 2010

Accepted 2 February 2010

#### Keywords:

Appearance schemas

Attachment styles

Self-schemas

### ABSTRACT

The purpose was to test, among women, the relationship between negative self-schemas and styles of attachment with men and women and two types of appearance investment (Self-evaluative and Motivational Salience). Predominantly Caucasian undergraduate women ( $N = 194$ ) completed a modified version of the Relationship Questionnaire, the Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form, and the Appearance Schemas Inventory-Revised. Linear multiple regression analyses were conducted with Motivational Salience and Self-evaluative Salience of appearance serving as dependent variables and relevant demographic variables, negative self-schemas, and styles of attachment to men serving as independent variables. Styles of attachment to women were not entered into these regression models because Pearson correlations indicated they were not related to either dependent variable. Self-evaluative Salience of appearance was related to impaired autonomy and performance negative self-schema and the preoccupation style of attachment with men, while Motivational Salience of appearance was related only to the preoccupation style of attachment with men.

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### Introduction

Body image dissatisfaction is a pressing issue for women. Body image dissatisfaction has been linked to depression (Bearman & Stice, 2008), substance abuse (Granner, Black, & Abood, 2002), anxiety (Atalay & Gencoz, 2008), and eating disorders (Babio, Arija, Sancho, & Canals, 2008) particularly among women. Body image has been described as a multidimensional interpersonal construct involving attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors about one's physical appearance within a social and cultural context (Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson, 2005; Cash & Deagle, 1997; Cash, Theriault, & Annis, 2004; Reas & Grilo, 2008; Vartanian, 2009).

While socio-cultural pressures (e.g., media) for beauty and thinness significantly contribute to one's body image, individual factors (e.g., beliefs) determine how and to what extent these societal standards influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Cafri et al., 2005; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2009). Appearance schemas have been shown to mediate the relationship between socio-cultural pressures for beauty and thinness and body image dissatisfaction (Clark & Tiggemann, 2008; Ip & Jarry, 2008). Appearance schemas are core beliefs of the

importance of appearance to one's definition of self (Cash, Melnyk, & Hrabosky, 2004). There are two types of appearance schemas: Self-evaluative Salience (SES) and Motivational Salience (MS; Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004). SES is the degree to which one's perceived social worth and sense of self are invested in appearance and MS is the degree to which one attends to and manages one's appearance (Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004; Cash, 2005).

Cash (2005) proposes that high SES is maladaptive and dysfunctional, but that MS only reflects pride in one's appearance and is not necessarily dysfunctional. SES has been related to body image dissatisfaction (Cash, Jakatdar, & Williams, 2004; Cash, Phillips, Santos, & Hrabosky, 2004; Ip & Jarry, 2008; Melnyk, Cash, & Janda, 2004), unhealthy eating behaviors (Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004), and poor psychosocial functioning (Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004), but little is known about the ways SES and MS are related to overall beliefs about the self or to styles of relationships with others. SES involves basing beliefs about the self and one's social worth on appearance; therefore, it is likely that SES is more strongly related to negative beliefs about the self and insecure ways of connecting with people in relationships than MS. The purpose of this study is to identify negative core beliefs about the self and dysfunctional relationship styles related to each type of appearance schema. This information will not only provide a greater understanding of the differences between these two types of appearance schemas (SES and MS) but also provide cognitive targets for treatment and prevention of body image dissatisfaction (Reas & Grilo, 2008).

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Self-schemas are rigid and inflexible core beliefs about the self and one's relationship with others (Young, 1994). Negative self-schemas are maladaptive dysfunctional beliefs about the self that are learned through early individual and social experiences (Young). Young (1994) theorized 15 different negative self-schemas that fall into five broad domains: Disconnection and Rejection (i.e., expectations for rejection by others), Impaired Autonomy and Performance (i.e., expectations for failure when functioning independently), Impaired Limits (i.e., difficulty setting personal limits), Other-Directedness (i.e., concern with others' opinions and behaviors), and Overvigilance/Inhibition (i.e., belief in the need for rigid self-standards). There is evidence among women that pathological eating behaviors (Leung, Waller, & Thomas, 1999; Stein & Corte, 2008) and negative body image beliefs (Stein & Corte, 2008) are associated with overall negative self-schemas. It is proposed that among women, negative self-schemas are more strongly related to SES than MS, indicating greater psychopathology among those whose self-worth is strongly tied to appearance.

While SES is the extent to which one bases their self-concept and self-definition on appearance, it is also the extent to which one bases perceived social worth on appearance (Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004). Greater overall investment in appearance has been related to poor psychosocial functioning (Cash, Melnyk, et al., 2004), nondisplay of perfection to others (Sherry et al., 2009), and insecure and anxious attachment styles (Cash, Theriault, et al., 2004). It is expected that in the current study, SES will be more strongly related to insecure attachment styles than MS. Attachment refers to the level of emotional connectedness people have toward significant individuals (e.g., parents, friends, partners/spouses) in their lives (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Campbell, Winterowd, Roring, & Porras, 2010). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) theorized four different attachment styles: secure (i.e., positive views of self and others), fearful (i.e., negative views of self and others), preoccupied (i.e., negative view of self, but a positive view of others), and dismissing (i.e., positive view of self and negative views of others). There is evidence to support the relationship between insecure attachment and negative body image among pre-adolescent and adolescent girls (Sharpe et al., 1998), adult women hospitalized for an eating disorder (Troisi et al., 2006), and community-dwelling adult women with eating disorder symptoms (Suldo & Sandberg, 2000).

According to social comparison theory, individuals are more likely to evaluate themselves against others they perceive as similar to themselves, as sharing some quality, or as belonging to some shared category (e.g., gender; Festinger, 1954; Stapel & Schwinghammer, 2004), and research has shown that comparing oneself to another in relationships is related to insecure attachment (LeBeau & Buckingham, 2008; Shira, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005). Among women, styles of attachment with men (different gender group) appear to have a different association with appearance investment than styles of attachment with women (same gender group). McKinley and Randa (2005) has shown among women that anxious attachment to a close friend (same gender for 86% of sample) is associated with negative body esteem while romantic attachment (someone of the opposite sex for 88% of sample) is not associated with body esteem. Another study among women found, anxious romantic attachment, not attachment to general other adults, is related to dysfunctional body image, and correlations have shown a relationship between overall appearance investment and both insecure general adult attachment and anxious or avoidant romantic attachment (Cash, Theriault, et al., 2004). These results suggest that among women, the association between insecure or anxious attachment and dimensions of negative body image occurs mostly within same gender relationships, but that overall appearance investment (includes SES and

MS) is related to dysfunctional attachments within opposite sex relationships (romantic). Further research is needed because no studies have examined the relationship between styles of attachment to a particular gender group and SES or MS specifically. In the current study, it is expected that among women there is an association between insecure styles of attachment with other women and men and SES, and an association between insecure styles of attachment with men and MS.

The aim of this study is to test among women the relationship of negative self-schemas and styles of attachment to men and women with each type of appearance schematic investment including SES and MS. It is hypothesized that SES is related to negative self-schemas and insecure attachments with women and men, and that MS is related to negative self-schemas and insecure attachments with men. It is also hypothesized that negative self-schemas and insecure attachments explain more of the variance in SES than in MS.

## Materials and methods

### Participants

Undergraduate heterosexual women ( $N = 194$ ) from a university in the southwest region of the U.S. make up the convenience sample in this study. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 with the largest year in a 4 year college degree program represented by those in their third year ( $n = 69$ , 36%) followed by those in their second year ( $n = 64$ , 33%), those in their fourth year ( $n = 37$ , 19%), and finally those in their first year ( $n = 24$ , 12%). The average family income level for all participants was between 50,000 and 60,000 U.S. dollars per year. The Body Mass Index (BMI) scores for the college women in this sample ranged from 16.64 to 40.38, with a mean of 23.18 and a standard deviation of 4.16. The racial breakdown for all participants was as follows (participants were able to endorse more than one category): Hispanic American ( $n = 3$ , 2%), White ( $n = 169$ , 87%), African American ( $n = 10$ , 5%), Native American ( $n = 24$ , 12%), Asian American ( $n = 1$ , <1%), and Other ( $n = 3$ , 2%). Most participants were single ( $n = 183$ , 94%) although some reported being married ( $n = 8$ , 4%) while others identified themselves as partnered ( $n = 3$ , 2%).

### Measures

The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The RQ is a 4-item measure of attachment styles. Each item represents one of the four attachment styles: secure (i.e., positive views of self and others: easy to be emotionally close to others and comfort with being interdependent; okay to be alone and not worried about rejection), dismissive (i.e., positive views of self and negative views of others: independent, does not want to rely on others), preoccupied (i.e., negative views of self and positive views of others: wants connections with others but does not feel valued compared to others), and fearful (i.e., negative views of self and others: discomfort with emotional closeness, has difficulty trusting, and worries s/he will get hurt). In this study, the RQ was adapted to measure general styles of attachment with women (4 items) and men (4 items). Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all like me, 7 = very much like me). The RQ is a reliable and valid measure of adult attachments (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In the present study, internal consistency reliability estimates were not calculated for the RQ items given that each attachment style score is represented by a single item.

The Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-2; Young, 1994). The YSQ-2 is a 75-item measure of 15 negative self-schemas which fall into five broad domains: (1) Disconnection and

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