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BODY IMAGE IN AN INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT: ADULT ATTACHMENT, FEAR OF INTIMACY, AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

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A growing literature attests to the salience of social factors in body image development and the importance of body image to interpersonal functioning. The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the relationships of specific facets of the multidimensional body image construct to interpersonal anxiety and adult attachment processes for both sexes. Participants were 103 male and 125 female college students who completed standardized assessments of dimensions of body image as well as social-evaluative anxiety, fear of romantic intimacy, general adult attachment, and romantic attachment. Our results indicated significant associations of body image evaluation, investment, and affect with social-evaluative anxiety for both sexes, and with romantic intimacy anxiety for women. For both sexes, greater body image dysfunction was linked to less secure general attachment, especially more preoccupied general adult attachment and more anxious romantic attachment. Findings are discussed in terms of the importance of understanding the interplay of body image and interpersonal variables. Clinical implications are elaborated.

Body image is a complex construct concerning individuals' perceptions of and attitudes about their own bodies, especially their physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990, 2002; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Core facets of body image attitudes include *eval-*

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uation (e.g., body satisfaction), *investment* (e.g., appearance self-schemas and the importance of internalized appearance ideals), and *affect* (e.g., body image emotions in specific situations). Much of the scientific literature on body image has focused only on the evaluative component, and on young women and eating disorders. However, researchers and clinicians increasingly are examining the multidimensional construct with more diverse samples, and in relation to other areas of psychosocial functioning (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Body image is clearly central to self-concept and has important implications for multiple areas of psychological functioning and the quality of life (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999).

One vein of empirical study has highlighted the role of interpersonal experiences in the development of body image attitudes. Within the context of appearance-based sociocultural norms and values, social feedback about one's appearance during childhood and adolescence may have a formative impact on body image. For example, recurrent appearance teasing or criticism, social comparisons, and modeling from one's peers (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002) and family members (Kearney-Cooke, 2002; McKinley, 1999; Rieves & Cash, 1996) may have an enduring influence on body image. These reflected appraisals convey two core messages to the developing person: (1) "What I look like affects my worth in the world." (2) "What I look like is unacceptable."

Not only is body image integrally a socially constructed phenomenon, it is reciprocally related to how people experience their interactions with others. In their review, Cash and Fleming (2002) concluded that a more negative body image evaluation was related to poorer social self-esteem and greater social anxiety. Using a daily diary methodology, Nezlek (1999) found that women and men with a more positive body image reported interactions that were more intimate, with which they felt more confidence and influence. Body image is also related to how individuals experience their romantic relationships. McKinley (1999) found that both young and middle-aged women's body esteem was positively related to their *perceptions* of their partners' approval of their appearance. Of course, individuals may projectively assume that their partners share their self-views of their bodies, and the more positive these assumptions are the more satisfied they are with their relationships (Rieves & Cash, 1999). Wiederman's (2002) review and a study by Cash, Beskin, and Yamamiya (2003) further indicate that body image can affect the quality and quantity of one's sexual experiences in romantic relationships.

In his classic works, Bowlby (1977, 1982) wrote of the attachment system as "the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others" (1977, p. 201). While early work focused largely on infant-caregiver attachment (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters,

& Wall, 1978), recent years have brought a growing interest in attachment processes in adult relationships, both close peer and romantic. Drawing upon Ainsworth's work, Hazan and Shaver (1987) initially proposed three attachment types—secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. Subsequently, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) described four adult attachment prototypes: (1) *Secure* individuals have a sense of worthiness or lovability and are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy; (2) *preoccupied* persons lack this sense of self-worthiness yet view others positively and seek their love and acceptance; (3) *fearful* people lack a sense of lovability and are avoidant of others in anticipation of rejection; (4) *dismissing* persons feel worthy of love yet detach from others whom they generally regard as untrustworthy. Thus, this "internal working models" framework on adult attachment relies on a self-model (as acceptable or unacceptable) and an other-model (as accepting/trustworthy or not) (Bartholomew, 1997). Shaver (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993) has argued that these "styles" can be understood as reflecting two basic attachment dimensions—anxiety and avoidance.

Despite the suggestion of certain psychodynamic perspectives on body image development (e.g., Goldberg, Mair, & Kerr, 1995; Krueger, 1990, 2002), surprisingly little research has examined links between attachment styles/dimensions and body image. Individuals who are insecure in their interpersonal attachment, whether due to self-perceived inadequacies or expectations of social rejection, may also be insecure about their physical worth or acceptability. As body image disturbances characterize persons with eating disorders, the relevance of attachment processes to body image functioning is suggested indirectly by recent literature reviews (O'Kearney, 1996; Ward, Ramsay, & Treasure, 2000), which offer evidence of insecure attachment among women with clinical eating disorders. These reviews indicate that earlier studies used questionable measures of attachment and that more recent studies focused largely on parental attachment rather than adult or romantic attachment. Unfortunately, most studies used a classificatory rather than a dimensional approach to attachment, and they compared eating disordered groups and controls but seldom examined specific symptom dimensions such as body image disturbance.

Sharpe and her colleagues (1998) compared the weight concerns of securely and insecurely attached preadolescent and adolescent girls. Although the two groups judged themselves equivalently in body size, insecurely attached girls were more preoccupied about thinness and body shape. The authors suggested that insecure attachment might place girls at risk for the development of eating disturbance. Suldo and Sandberg (2000) found a preoccupied attachment style among college women was

associated with a drive for thinness and bulimic symptoms. Moreover, Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that every scale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI; Garner, 1991), including the Body Dissatisfaction scale, correlated significantly with women's preoccupied attachment in romantic relationships. Evans and Wertheim (1998) observed that insecure romantic attachment and intimacy concerns were related to young women's bulimic eating symptoms, including a greater drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction. To our knowledge, no study has examined relationships between body image and attachment among males.

The purpose of the current investigation with a young adult population was to enhance our understanding of the relationship of body image to interpersonal discomfort and adult attachment styles. We examined associations for both general and romantic relationships. We further sought to expand the literature by studying men as well as women and by including assessments of all three components of body image attitudes (i.e., evaluation, investment, and affect; Cash, 2002a; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

At a large, mid-Atlantic U.S. public university, students volunteered to participate in the study in exchange for extra credit in psychology classes. The 228 participants (103 men and 125 women) were 18 to 25 years old (*Mdn* = 20). The ethnically diverse sample was 58% white, 30% black, 8% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 2% other ethnicities. Regarding current relationship status, 35% reported being in a serious nonmarital relationship, 7% were married, 18% were exclusively dating one person, 9% were dating multiple persons, and 30% were not dating. The body mass index (kg weight / m^2 height) for men and women averaged 24.9 (*SD* = 4.4) and 24.2 (*SD* = 5.6), respectively.

PROCEDURE AND MATERIALS

Participants received self-administered materials to complete anonymously and return within a week. There were three standardized body image assessments.

Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ). The 34-item short-form of the well-validated MBSRQ (Brown, Cash, & Mikulka, 1990; Cash, 2004) consists of multi-item subscales that measure specific facets of appearance-related body image. Pertinent to

this study was the 9-item MBSRQ's Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS) that assesses one's evaluations of one's physical characteristics (e.g., weight, face, mid-torso, overall appearance, etc.) using a 5-point dissatisfaction-satisfaction response format. Scores are means of the 9 items. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alphas) for the present sample were .82 for men and .81 for women.

Appearance Schemas Inventory (ASI). The 14-item ASI measures dysfunctional investment in one's appearance (Cash, 2004; Cash & Labarge, 1996). On a 5-point disagree-agree format, respondents convey the extent of their schematic beliefs or assumptions about the importance, meaning, and impact of their physical appearance vis-à-vis their lives and sense of self (e.g., "What I look like is an important part of who I am." "I should do whatever I can to always look my best."). In this study, the ASI's Cronbach's alphas were .81 for men and .85 for women. Scores are composite item means.

Situational Inventory of Body image Dysphoria (SIBID). Measuring negative body image emotions, the SIBID asks persons to indicate on a 5-point frequency scale the extent to which they experience dysphoric body image emotions in each of 48 specific social and nonsocial situations (Cash, 2004, 2002c). The internal consistency of the composite mean scores in this sample was .98 for each gender.

Standardized measures of interpersonal anxiety and attachment were as follows.

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Scale. The 12-item FNE assesses anxiety in anticipation of being evaluated by others (Leary, 1983). Items are rated from 1 ("not at all characteristic of me") to 5 ("extremely characteristic of me"), with higher summed scores reflective of greater social-evaluative anxiety. Exemplary items are: "I am afraid that people will find fault with me." "I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things." The study's internal consistency of the FNE was .89 for men and .90 for women.

Fear-of-Intimacy Scale (FIS). The 35-item FIS assesses comfort-discomfort with emotional intimacy in close romantic relationships (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). On a 5-point scale, respondents indicate how characteristic each statement would be of them if they were in a "close, dating relationship" with a person. Representative items are: "I would feel at ease telling the person that I care about him/her" (reverse scored), "A part of me would be afraid to make a long-term commitment to the person," and "I would be afraid of sharing my private thoughts with the person." The internal consistency of the summed FIS score was .92 and .94 for men and women, respectively.

Relationship Styles Questionnaire (RSQ). Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) 30-item RSQ measures general adult attachment, based on the

four-category model (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The RSQ produces scores on four dimensions of attachment based on respondents' five-point item ratings (from "not at all like me" to "very like me"). These scale dimensions are Secure (five items; e.g., "I find it easy to get emotionally close to others"), Fearful (four items; e.g., "I find it difficult to trust others completely"), Preoccupied (four items; e.g., "I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them"), and Dismissing (5 items, e.g., "It is very important for me to feel self-sufficient"). Each score is the mean of its constituent items. Congruent with Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) findings, the internal consistencies of these scales in this study varied from .31 to .75. The developers of the RSQ have argued that lower alphas are defensible in that each dimension reflects an additive combination of disparate self-model and other-model perspectives.

Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) Questionnaire. The 36-item ECR (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) measures adult romantic attachment, based upon a principal components analysis of items from extant attachment inventories. The ECR uses a 7-point disagree-agree format to discern how respondents generally feel in romantic relationships. Its two 18-item, higher-order scales assess romantic attachment dimensions of Avoidance and Anxiety. In our sample, internal consistencies for men and women respectively were .93 and .92 for Avoidance and .93 and .95 for Anxiety. Scores are the sums of item responses.

RESULTS

For descriptive purposes, Table 1 presents means and standard deviations of the study's measures. For men and women, Pearson correlations were computed to ascertain relationships between the three measures of body image and the measures of general social anxiety, fear of intimacy in romantic relationships, and the dimensional measures of both general and romantic attachment. Table 2 summarizes these results.[1]

For both sexes, greater social-evaluative anxiety was significantly related to more body dissatisfaction, more dysfunctional investment in appearance, and more frequent body image dysphoria. A similar pattern of significant, albeit lower, correlations occurred between women's fear of intimacy in romantic relationships and their body image.

As Table 2 depicts, two of Bartholomew's four dimensions of general

1. Partial correlations were calculated to examine these bivariate relationships with BMI controlled. Regression analyses were also conducted with BMI entered as a control variable in the initial step. The substantive findings were unchanged in these analyses.

TABLE 1. Means and Standard Deviations of the Study's Measures

Body Image, Social Anxiety, and Attachment Measures	Men (n = 103)		Women (n = 125)	
	Mean	(*SD*)	Mean	(*SD*)
Body Satisfaction (BASS)	3.72	(0.65)	3.34	(0.69)
Dysfunctional Body Image Investment (ASI)	2.65	(0.59)	2.50	(0.66)
Body Image Dysphoria (SIBID)	1.25	(0.77)	1.71	(0.89)
Social–Evaluative Anxiety (General)	30.7	(6.60)	27.8	(6.00)
Intimacy Anxiety (Romantic)	81.6	(20.50)	68.8	(21.60)
General Adult Attachment (RSQ) - Secure	3.50	(0.59)	3.48	(0.61)
General Adult Attachment (RSQ) - Preoccupied	2.92	(0.82)	2.80	(0.79)
General Adult Attachment (RSQ) - Fearful	2.61	(0.85)	2.68	(0.87)
General Adult Attachment (RSQ) - Dismissing	3.21	(0.60)	3.30	(0.54)
Romantic Attachment (ECR) - Anxious	3.53	(1.15)	3.31	(1.22)
Romantic Attachment (ECR) - Avoidant	2.92	(1.06)	2.59	(1.13)

adult attachment were associated with the three facets of body image. For both sexes, more secure attachment was significantly modestly related to greater body image satisfaction and less dysfunctional self-investment in appearance. Securely attached men also reported less frequent body image dysphoria. Even stronger significant correlations occurred between these body image parameters and the dimension of preoccupied attachment. Men and women who were more preoccupied in their adult attachment orientations were less content with, more dysfunctionally invested in, and more dysphoric about their physical appearance. In contrast, the fearful and dismissing attachment dimensions were unrelated to any body image variable for either gender.

Table 2 also presents the correlations of the anxious and avoidant dimensions of romantic attachment with the dimensions of body image. Only the anxious attachment orientation showed a consistent pattern of associations with the three body image measures for both sexes. The pattern was similar to that observed above for the preoccupied dimension of general adult attachment. For avoidant romantic attachment, only one modest correlation was significant—namely, greater attachment avoidance was associated with more dysfunctional appearance investment among women.

Next we performed a multivariate examination of the relationships of attachment dimensions to body image functioning. In view of the moderate associations among the three body image variables, we computed a composite index as the mean of normalized scores for the BASS (re-

TABLE 2. Correlations of Body Image with Interpersonal Anxiety and Attachment Dimensions

Social Anxiety and Attachment Variables	Body Satisfaction (BASS)		Dysfunctional Body Image Investment (ASI)		Body Image Dysphoria (SIBID)		Composite Body Image Dysfunction	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Social–Evaluative Anxiety (General)	–.477***	–.392***	.433***	.514***	.480***	.519***	.565***	.550***
Intimacy Anxiety (Romantic)	.004	–.331***	.117	.288***	.136	.235**	.107	.330***
General Adult Attachment (RSQ)								
Secure	.286**	.205*	–.323***	–.227*	–.295**	–.148	–.368***	–.225*
Preoccupied	–.478***	–.250**	.397***	.307***	.365***	.330***	.500***	.343***
Fearful	–.041	–.109	.077	.040	.174	.095	.132	.094
Dismissing	–.019	–.056	.045	–.068	.025	–.047	.038	–.023
Romantic Attachment(ECR)								
Anxious	–.430***	–.273**	.412***	.399***	.432***	.286***	.521***	.370***
Avoidant	.031	–.174	.123	.187*	.100	.028	.089	.150

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

verse-scored), ASI, and SIBID. Thus, higher scores reflect greater body image dysfunctionality (i.e., dissatisfaction, excessive investment, and distress; see Cash, 2002b). Bivariate correlations with this composite index are shown in Table 2.[2] Using stepwise multiple linear regressions, we entered the general and romantic attachment scales as predictors of body image dysfunctionality for each sex. Among men, three variables entered the equation, each explaining significant body image variance—the dimension of anxious romantic attachment [R^2 change = .272, $F(1, 95) = 35.46$, $p < .001$], followed by general attachment security [R^2 change = .045, $F(1, 94) = 6.24$, $p < .014$], and general preoccupied attachment [R^2 change = .029, $F(1, 93) = 4.06$, $p < .046$]. Thus, this three-step regression accounted for 34.6% of variation in body image [$F(3, 93) = 16.39$, $p < .001$] and indicated that body image dysfunctionality for men was associated with more anxious romantic attachment (beta = .263), less overall adult attachment security (beta = -.226), and greater general adult attachment preoccupation (beta = .252). Among women, only one attachment dimension entered the equation—anxious romantic attachment (beta = .370), explaining 13.7% of variance in body image, $F(1, 117) = 18.57$, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation with college women and men confirm significant relationships between interpersonal functioning and multiple facets of body image. Body image dissatisfaction, dysfunctional investment in appearance, and situational body image dysphoria were all moderately associated with higher levels of social-evaluative anxiety for both sexes. These relationships were unaffected by participants' body mass indices. Thus, for women and men alike, a negative body image entailed greater discomfort and concerns about approval and acceptance in social interactions. For women but not men, fear of intimacy in romantic relationships was also significantly related to these three aspects of body image. Perhaps this gender difference reflects young heterosexual women's beliefs that the success of their romantic relationships with men will be strongly influenced by their own physical attractiveness. Moreover, in our society, young women's body image experiences may

2. Given the apparent gender differences in the magnitude of some of these correlations, we used a *z* statistic to test the significance of the differences. Only two gender differences were reliable. Body dissatisfaction (on the BASS) was related to greater intimacy anxiety for women than for men ($p < .05$). Body dissatisfaction was associated with preoccupied attachment to a greater extent for men than for women ($p < .01$).

mirror their symbolic attempts to deal with the inner conflicts or vulnerabilities associated with their new sexual maturity and close relationships (Thériault, 1998, 2002). A more negative body image may reflect projective assumptions that men will find them unacceptable (Rieves & Cash, 1999), and lead to greater self-protective caution in emotional intimacy. Furthermore, emotional intimacy increases the likelihood of sexual intimacy, and a negative body image is associated with more self-conscious anxiety about and avoidance of sexual activity (Cash et al., 2003; Wiederman, 2002).

Various studies have indicated that women with eating disorders, who clearly have a dysfunctional body image (Cash & Deagle, 1997), may exhibit more insecure parental, general adult, or romantic attachment styles (e.g., Friedberg & Lyddon, 1996; Kenny & Hart, 1992; Sharpe et al., 1998; Ward et al., 2000). Our study examined how both general and romantic adult attachment styles might be associated more specifically with facets of body image. Using Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) Relationship Styles Questionnaire, we found a more favorable body image among men and women who were secure in their general adult attachment. Among the three insecure dimensions of fearful, dismissing, and preoccupied general attachment, we found that only the latter was significantly related to body image. Both women and men who were more preoccupied in their attachment styles reported more body image dissatisfaction and dysphoria as well as more schematic investment in their physical appearance. These findings extend those of Suldo and Sandberg (2000), who concluded that only preoccupied attachment was predictive of the college women's drive for thinness and bulimic symptoms.

Regarding dimensions of romantic attachment measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (Brennan et al., 1998), we found that for both sexes all three body image indices were significantly associated with anxious but not avoidant attachment. Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that preoccupied (i.e., anxious but not avoidant) attachment in romantic relationships was associated with all EDI scales, including Body Dissatisfaction. Further analyses in their study indicated that Body Dissatisfaction was most related to specific attachment attributes of frustration, jealousy, and clinginess. Evans and Wertheim (1998) similarly concluded that body dissatisfaction was linked to more anxious romantic attachment.

Collectively, our results can be understood in terms of "internal working models" of self and other (Bartholomew, 1990, 1997; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Underlying anxious, preoccupied attachment styles represent a negative self-model (feelings of unworthiness) and a positive other-model (an orientation toward others as providing valued

and validating support). Secure attachment reflects positive models of self and other. A negative (positive) body image is a key facet of this negative (positive) model of self. Our findings go beyond simple body image discontent and dysphoria and include relationships with one's psychological investment in his or her appearance. The Appearance Schemas Inventory measures dysfunctional body image investment and reflects an array of beliefs that one's physical appearance is central to one's sense of self and one's social acceptability (Cash, 2004; Cash & Labarge, 1996).

Our multiple regression analyses revealed anxious romantic attachment as the strongest predictor of body image dysfunctionality for men and women. Indeed, for women no other attachment variable explained further variance in body image. For men, general attachment security and preoccupied attachment did account for additional variance beyond anxious romantic attachment. As noted above, we also found that romantic intimacy anxiety for women (but not men) was related to greater body image dissatisfaction, distress, and appearance investment. Collectively, these data suggest that young, heterosexual women's body image concerns may be experienced as particularly salient in the context of romantic relationships. Furthermore, although the bivariate correlations between body image and attachment dimensions were sometimes higher for men than women, this gender difference was significant in only one instance—in the association between preoccupied adult attachment and body dissatisfaction. While this interesting pattern certainly requires replication, it may reflect the possibility that gender-based cultural forces are more powerful, overriding body image determinants among females, whereas for men individual attachment processes remain determinant. The role of gender in the pathways of body image development is less studied and understood in males than females (Corson & Andersen, 2002; Levine & Smolak, 2002a; Smolak, 2002; Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002).

Of course, we cannot infer causality from our correlational findings. Nevertheless, we believe that social relations both shape and are shaped by body image experiences (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999). In one possible trajectory, early experiences such as appearance teasing or criticism as well as other social and familial processes that undermine the development of attachment security may foster self-schemas of personal, interpersonal, and physical unacceptability, which lead to insecurity and anxiety in subsequent social and intimate relations. Having a negative body image with excessive investment in one's appearance for self-definition, in turn, may further exacerbate one's insecurity and anxiety in relationships, particularly those that are physically and emotionally intimate. Despite unanswered causal ques-

tions, our results highlight the value of understanding body image in interpersonal contexts (Cash & Fleming, 2002; Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Research with children and adolescents could elucidate the developmental interplay of body image and both parental and peer attachment processes. Continued research is needed to examine how particular parameters of body image influence social cognition, as individuals process information about their social environments. Naturalistic and social observational research could enhance our understanding of the impact of body image in everyday human relationships.

Even though interventions to promote a positive body image or repair a negative one recognize the cultural and social contexts of body image development, their emphasis is often on modifying an individual's thoughts and behaviors in response to these contextual events (Cash, 1997; Cash & Strachan, 2002). An ecological/activist approach to prevention focuses on changing these contexts themselves as well as persons' relationships with them (Levine & Smolak, 2002b). Although data are currently unavailable, the application of interpersonal therapy to body image problems warrants study, given its explicit focus on interpersonal relationships and experiences (Weissman, Markowitz, & Klerman, 2000).

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