

Sexual identity, affect, and disordered eating among young adult women

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Overview

- Disordered eating behaviors are defined as “troublesome eating behaviors...which occur less frequently or are less severe than those required to meet the full criteria for a diagnosis of an eating disorder” (Pereira & Alvarenga, 2007)
- Examples of disordered eating behaviors: binge eating, overeating, loss of control of eating, emotional eating, and restriction
- Some disordered eating behaviors have been found to be more common among sexual minority women, as compared to heterosexual women (Parker & Harriger, 2020)
 - Binge eating (Dotan et al., 2021; Miller & Luk, 2019; Polimeni et al., 2009)
 - Mixed findings for restriction (Miller & Luk, 2019)



Overview, cont.

- Affective processes, such as negative affect, have been found to be associated with disordered eating among general samples of young adult women (Haedt-Matt & Keel, 2011)
 - Studies used ecological momentary assessment methods
- More research is needed to assess the effect of positive affect on disordered eating, as findings have varied across the literature
 - Among adolescent and young adult women, positive affect was found to not be associated with binge eating or purging (Mikhail et al., 2024)
 - Low positive affect has been found to be associated with binge eating (Flynn et al., 2023)
 - Researchers have discussed the importance of using EMA research to assess positive affect, as high and low positive affect may impact binge eating (Mason et al., 2021)



Overview, cont.

- Little is known about whether the associations between affect and disordered eating hold across sexual identity
- Previous research has suggested that sexual minority women (SMW) may experience more factors that are associated with negative affect (e.g., discrimination, stigma) and disordered eating (Mason et al., 2018)
- Research is needed to examine the potential moderating role of sexual identity on the association between affect and disordered eating



The Current Study - Purpose

The current study examined the impact of negative and positive affect on disordered eating and whether these associations are similar for both heterosexual and SMW.



Participants and Method

Health and Experiences
in **Real Life** Project (HER
Life)

297 young adult
cisgender women

Mean age = 25.34
(*SD* = 3.38)

Reported binge eating in
the last 2 weeks at
baseline

EMA data collected via
LifeData app

- Sent 5 prompted surveys daily
over 14 days (9am-9pm)

Participants could receive
up to \$150 for
participating in the study
and completing at least
80% of the EMA surveys



Materials

- Items were asked during each prompted survey
- Current negative affect and positive affect assessed with 10 items adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Posner et al., 2005; Watson & Clark, 1994)
 - “Right now I feel...”
 - 0 = *Not at all* to 6 = *Extremely*
- Disordered eating behaviors (Fairburn & Begin, 2008; Garaulet et al., 2012)
 - Four items: overeating, loss of control eating, emotional eating, dietary restraint
 - “The next several questions will ask you about your eating since the last prompted survey.”
 - 0 = *Not at all* to 6 = *Very much so*
 - One item: skipping meals to control weight/shape
 - “How much did each of the following factors influence you to not eat since the last prompted survey?”
 - 0 = *Not at all* to 6 = *Very much so*



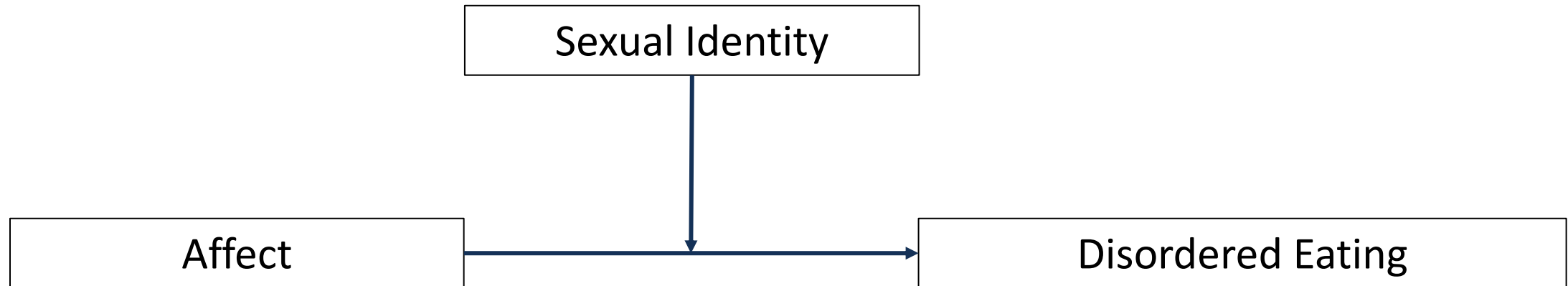
Analysis Approach

- Multilevel modeling using fixed effects
 - Level 1: moments; Level 2: person
- Analyses were conducted in Mplus v.8.9
- Data were cleaned and assumptions of the analyses were verified
- Overeating, loss of control eating, dietary restraint, and skipping meals to control weight/shape had between 45-60% of answers as zeros
 - Treated as zero-inflated Poisson distributions
- Emotional eating had 65.9% of the answers as zeros
 - Treated as dichotomous
- Results today will focus on the dichotomized version of the zero-inflated Poisson models (i.e., predicting likelihood of engaging in that disordered eating behavior)



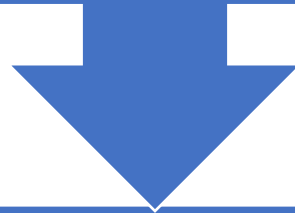
Analysis Approach, cont.

- 10 analyses were conducted
 - Predictors: Negative affect and positive affect
 - Outcomes: Overeating, loss of control eating, dietary restraint, skipping meals, and emotional eating



Results - Compliance

Participants had to complete at least two prompted surveys to be included in the analyses



Participants completed 66.7% of the surveys over 14 days

SMW: 62.9%; Heterosexual women: 70.3%



Results

- The main effect of sexual identity was not significant for any of the affect and disordered eating associations.
- The associations between negative affect and overeating, emotional eating, and skipping meals were **moderated** by sexual identity ($ps \leq .035$)
 - When women reported greater negative affect, they reported they were more likely to have engaged in overeating, emotional eating, and skipping meals
 - **These effects were stronger for heterosexual women**
- There was a **negative association** between positive affect and emotional eating ($p < .001$)
 - When women reported greater positive affect, they reported that they were less likely to engage in emotional eating



Discussion

- There was only significant moderation for negative affect and three disordered eating behaviors, and in each case, the effects were stronger for heterosexual women than SMW
- There was a significant association between lower positive affect and greater likelihood of emotional eating (but no other eating behaviors)
- Future research should examine the mechanisms that may explain why the effects were stronger for heterosexual women
- Future research should also examine the mechanisms that may explain the similarities of the associations of affective processes with disordered eating between heterosexual and SMW
- Limitations
 - Disordered eating outcomes were single items
 - Generalizability of results



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- HaBiT Lab Research Assistants



Questions?

For a copy of the slides →

