

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COPING ON DISORDERED EATING IN YOUNG WOMEN

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Abstract

- Disordered eating remains pervasive among young women in the United States.
- Religious coping is a significant yet less widely researched factor in women's risk for eating disturbances. A review of the literature was conducted to investigate the role of religious coping on disordered eating in young women.
- It appears that positive religious coping protects against disordered eating, while negative religious coping heightens the risk for eating pathology. Self-esteem appears to mediate the latter correlation, such that higher self-esteem negates the effects of negative religious coping.
- These results may be used to tailor spiritual-based interventions for young women with eating disturbances.

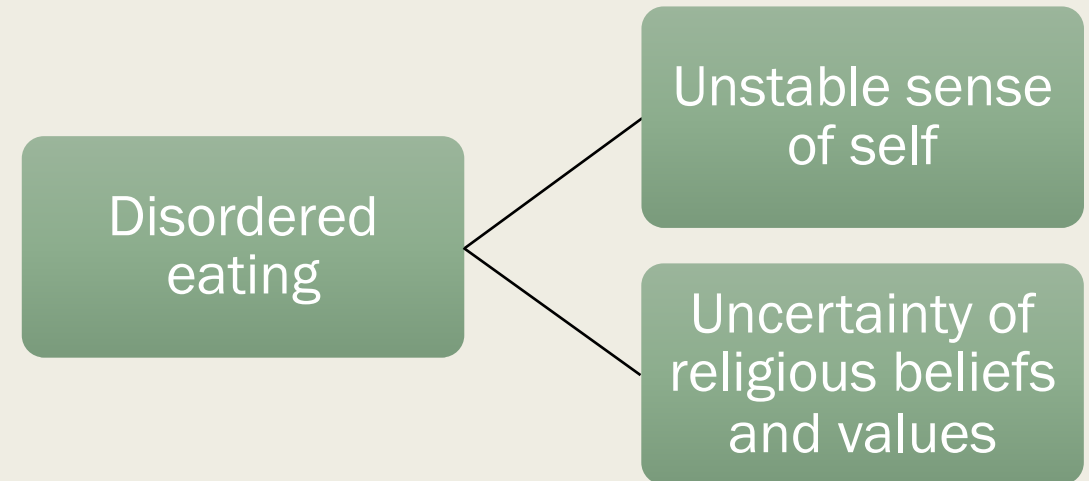
Introduction

- Eating disorders are a prevalent form of chronic illness in U.S. for female adolescents and young adults (Wade et al., 2011)
- Disordered eating represents a **continuum** of maladaptive eating behaviors (Dancyger & Garfinkel, 1995)



Contextual Factors in Young Adulthood

- Young adulthood provides the greatest opportunity for **identity formation** related to one's worldview (Arnett, 2000)
 - Increasingly **examining and owning belief systems**, including those of religion and spirituality (Fowler, 1981)



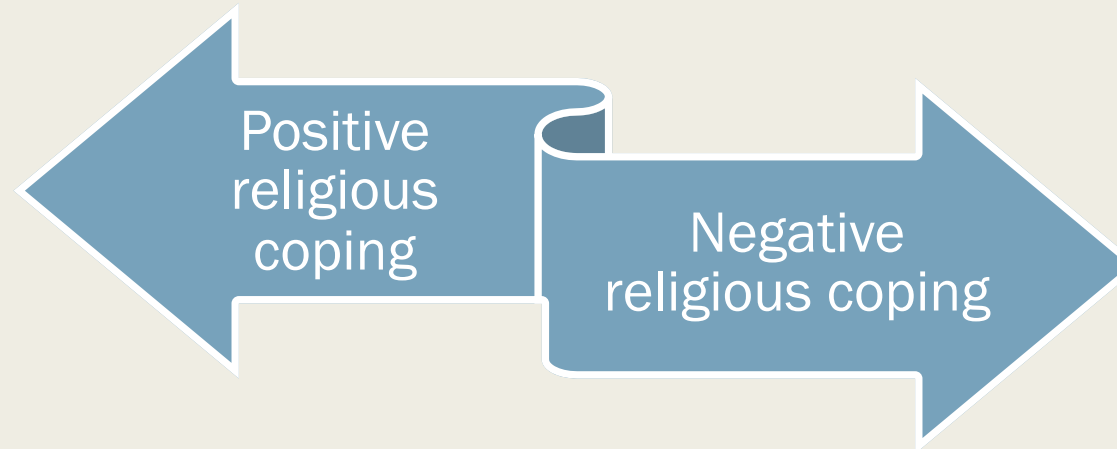
- Disordered eating is correlated with an unstable sense of self and uncertainty of religious beliefs and values during **this time** (Boyatzis & McConnell, 2006; Potterton et al., 2020; Shawel Abebe et al., 2013)

Religious Coping



- **Religious coping:** Attachment to God/Higher Power during times of difficulty or transition; involves search for meaning and identity (Pargament et al., 2011)
- Consists of two elements:

Secure attachment to a Higher Power during times of difficulty or transition

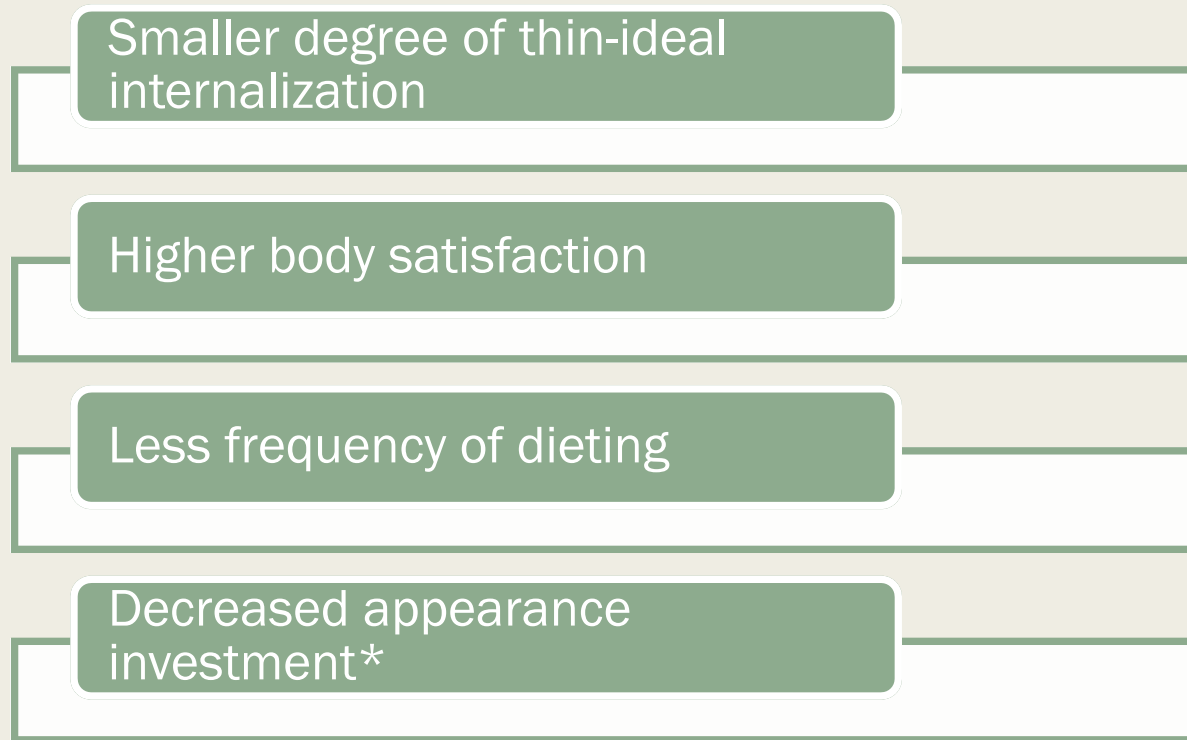


Uncertain relationship with a Higher Power during difficult times; reflects deeper spiritual struggle

💡 **Research question:** How would religious coping affect disordered eating in young women, given their identity transformation and increased risk for disordered eating during this period?

Effects of Positive Religious Coping

- Studies generally show an **inverse trend** between positive religious coping and disordered eating in young women (Goulet et al., 2017; Jacobs-Pilipski et al., 2005; Latzer et al., 2015)
- Factors associated with positive religious coping:



*Appearance investment is defined by the reliance on outward appearance as a measure of self-worth (Goulet et al., 2017)

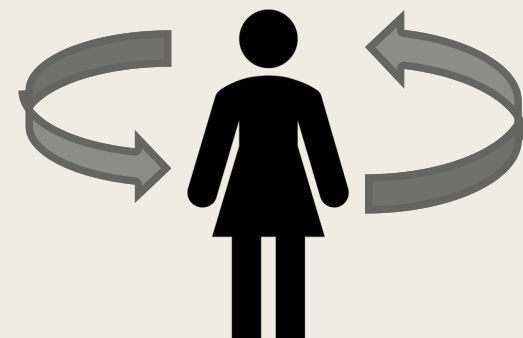
Effects of Negative Religious Coping

- Negative religious coping is significantly associated with the following disordered eating factors (Buser & Bernard, 2013; Latzer et al., 2014; Lemmon & Homan, 2014):

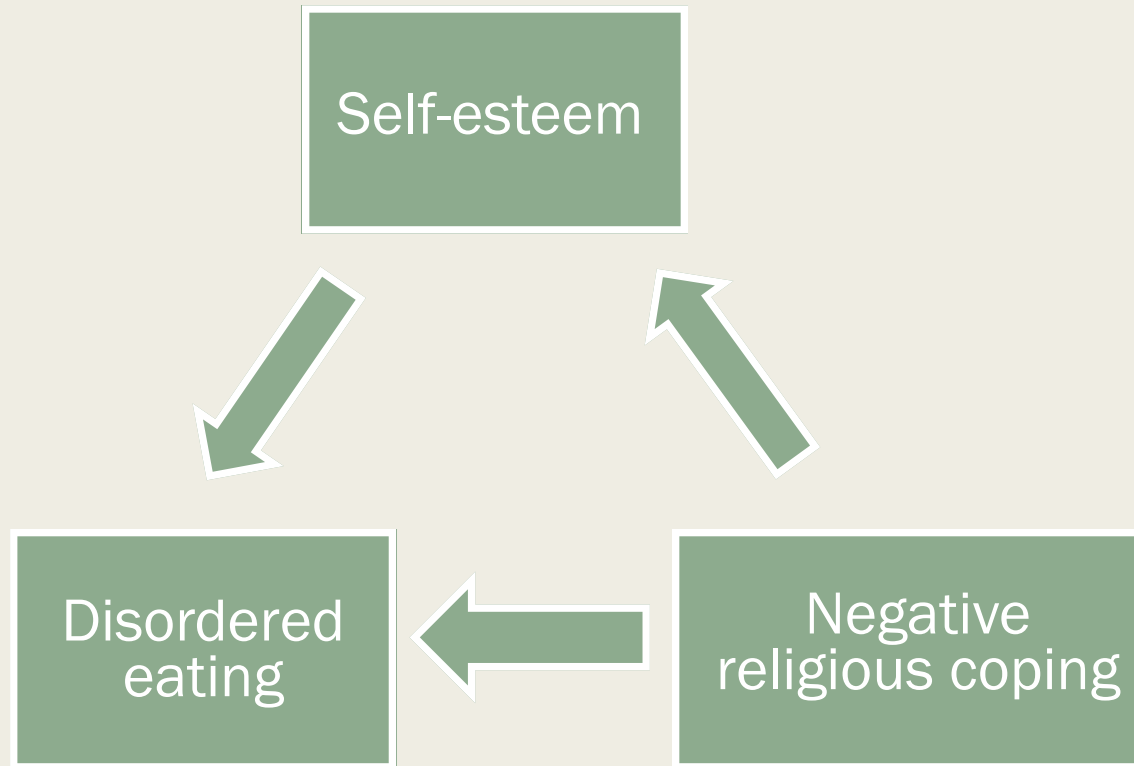


Explanation of Findings

- Consistency with previous research
 - Significant association between negative religious coping and **depression, anxiety, and trauma**, as well as **better psychological adjustment** among those who engaged in positive religious coping (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013)
- Holistic benefits of positive religious coping
 - Young women with a secure attachment to a spiritual power were found to believe in the **sacred quality of their bodies**, which in turn appeared to create more appreciation of their physical bodies and a greater ability to recognize their internal states (Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013)
- Role of punishment in negative religious coping
 - Feeling **punished** by a spiritual power, an element of negative religious coping, can negatively affect self-esteem and thus **increase risk for disordered eating** (Latzer et al., 2014)



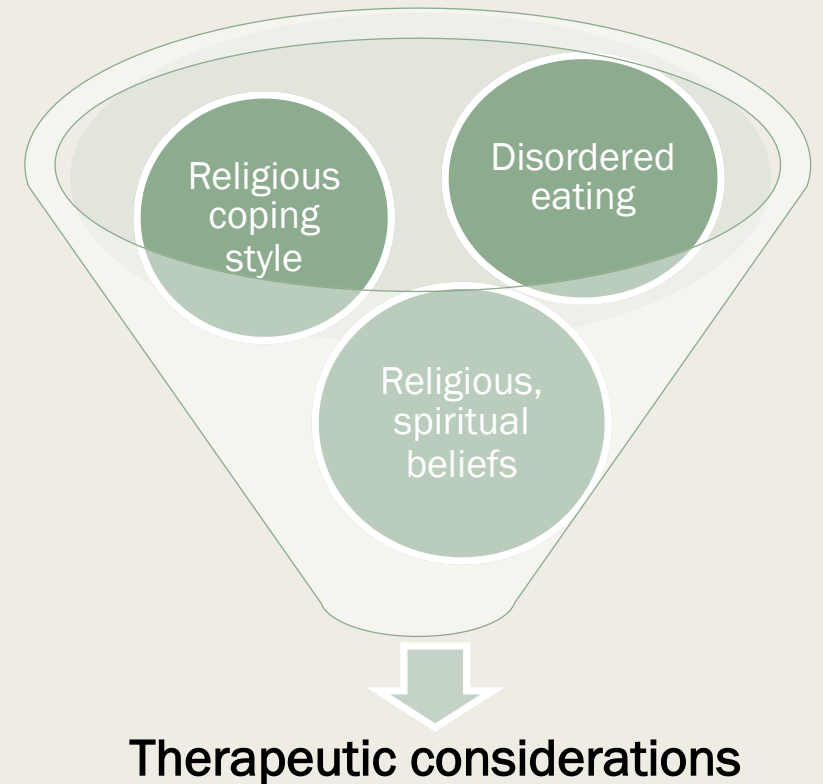
Significant Role of Self-Esteem



- Self-esteem was found to completely **mediate** the correlation between negative religious coping and disordered eating, such that the association between negative religious coping and disordered eating was no longer significant when including level of self-esteem (Latzer et al., 2014)
- Lower self-esteem may pose a **significant risk factor** for disordered eating

Clinical Implications

- Findings may be applicable to a substantial group of college-age women
 - High percentage of college students report using religion as a coping tool, and a large portion of freshman college students endorse a belief in God and an interest in spirituality (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004; Pargament et al., 2000)
- Clinicians may utilize relevant **spiritual-based interventions** in their therapeutic work with religious and/or spiritual clients (Buser & Bernard, 2013)
 - Help explore the ways in which religious coping style can lead to disordered eating behaviors
 - Use of cognitive therapy to deal with negative religious and/or spiritual beliefs may be beneficial (Buser & Bernard, 2013)



Discussion

- Research on religious coping style has **increased understanding** of the relationship between disordered eating and religious beliefs, as well as the **potential benefits** of incorporating religious beliefs as part of the therapeutic treatment
- Limitations and future directions
 - Research has been **correlational**, so it cannot be assumed that negative religious coping causes disordered eating, or that positive religious coping prevents it
 - Consideration of **newer forms** of disordered eating are needed in future studies (i.e. binge-eating disorder, orthorexia nervosa)
 - Future studies should incorporate more **diverse samples** for generalizability of findings (Akrawi et al., 2017)

Conclusion

- Negative religious coping style may be one factor into clients' disordered eating symptoms
- For individuals with a secure attachment to a Higher Power, developing coping skills related to their religion and/or spirituality may serve as a protective mechanism against disordered eating
- The significant role of self-esteem should be considered with clients with disordered eating
- It is recommended that clinicians address religious coping styles with clients who endorse religious and/or spiritual beliefs and engage in disordered eating

References available upon request

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