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Online Sexual Harassment, Disordered Eating Attitudes and Body Shame in Young Women

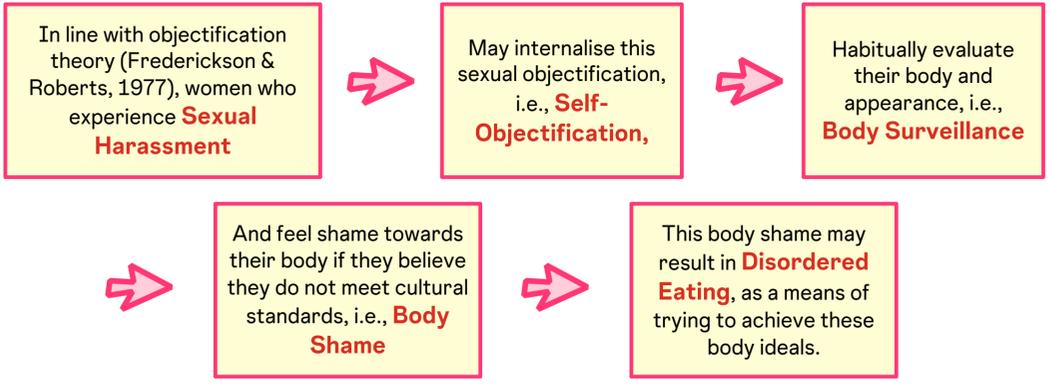


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BACKGROUND

Experiences of sexual harassment are associated with disordered eating in young women, and this association is influenced by body shame (Hayes et al., 2021).



However, women are not only experiencing sexual harassment in-person, but also online (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2024; Iroegbu et al., 2024).

In the present study, we expected that both online sexual harassment and body shame would be positive predictors of disordered eating attitudes and there would be an indirect association between online sexual harassment and disordered eating attitudes, via body shame.

METHOD

Participants

- 146 female participants, aged 18-30 years (M = 19.14, SD = 1.69).
- Participants were recruited by opportunity sampling, via social media platforms, and YSJ PReP scheme.

Measures

- Online Sexual Harassment Scale** (Buchanan et al., 2022). 12 item self-report measure of online sexual harassment victimization.
 - Eating Attitudes Test-26** (Garner et al., 1982). 26 item self-report measure of disordered eating attitudes.
 - Objectified Body Consciousness Scale – Body Shame** (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). 8 item self-report measure of body shame.
- Distributed on Qualtrics.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses and Correlations

- See Table 1.

Multiple Regression

- See Table 2.

Model 1 – Online sexual harassment positively predicted disordered eating attitudes.

Model 2 – Body shame positively predicted disordered eating attitudes.

Model 3 – Combination of online sexual harassment and body shame positively predicted disordered eating attitudes.

When body shame was added into the model, the contribution of online sexual harassment reduced, $\beta = .190, p = .005$, indicating provisional support for a partial mediating effect (Barron & Kenny, 1986).

Analysis of Indirect Association

- We examined the size and significance of the indirect association using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013), running the mediational model with 5,000 bootstraps.
- The 95% confidence interval did not contain zero – The test was considered significant at the $p < .05$ level (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). See Figure 1.

Table 1 Bivariate Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach's Alphas.

Variable	1	2	3
1. Online Sexual Harassment			
2. Body Shame	.231*		
3. Disordered Eating Attitudes	.321**	.612**	
M	28.14	34.62	15.37
SD	11.76	10.17	11.81
Cronbach's Alpha	.95	.86	.88

Note. N = 146. ** $p < .001$. * $p < .01$.

Table 2 Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Disordered Eating Attitudes.

	Adjusted R ²	β
Model 1 (Online Sexual Harassment)	.097**	.32**
Model 2 (Body Shame)	.370**	.61**
Model 3 (Indirect Association)		
Step 1: Online Sexual Harassment	.097**	.32**
Step 2: Online Sexual Harassment	.400**	.19*
Body Shame		.57**

Note. N = 146. β = Standardised regression weight. ** $p < .001$. * $p < .01$.

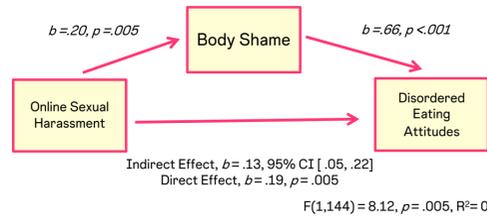


Figure 1 Indirect Association Between Online Sexual Harassment and Disordered Eating Attitudes, Via Body Shame.

DISCUSSION

- Online sexual harassment and body shame both positively predicted disordered eating attitudes.
 - In line with previous findings (Hayes et al., 2021; Nechita et al., 2021; Oliver et al., 2023; O'Loghlen et al., 2022; Romito et al., 2019; Zheng & Lyu, 2024).
- Indirect association between online sexual harassment and disordered eating attitudes, via body shame.
 - Aligning with previous research examining in-person sexual harassment (Hayes et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2017).
 - Furthering the research into this online context (Dollimore et al., 2024; Oliver et al., 2023), by examining the specific role of body shame within the relationship between online sexual harassment and disordered eating.
- Direct relationship between online sexual harassment and disordered eating attitudes also observed, suggesting that the relationship is not fully explained by body shame (Zhao et al., 2010).
 - Other factors may play a role, such as self-objectification, body-surveillance, self-esteem and personal safety anxiety (Dollimore et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2021; Oliver et al., 2023).

Limitations and Future Research

- Cross-sectional design**: Longitudinal design is needed to fully test mediation (Jose, 2016).
- Data collected online**: Future research should include the use of reCAPTCHA (Sherman et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2022).
- Largely white and heterosexual sample**: Future research should seek to recruit a more diverse sample of young women (Iroegbu et al., 2024).

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