

Associations Between Visceral Sensitivity, Body Dissatisfaction, and Restrictive Eating in Undergraduates

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

- Visceral sensitivity is a heightened awareness and anxiety about one's gastrointestinal system.
- Relationships between visceral sensitivity and eating disorder pathology have been found in specific populations, such as individuals with chronic constipation and individuals receiving inpatient eating disorder treatment (Murray et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021).
- Little research has been conducted to examine these relationships in the general population.
- Knowledge about the relationships between visceral sensitivity and eating disorder pathology in the general population may aid in the treatment of eating disorder symptoms.
- These analyses were preregistered at OSF: <https://osf.io/zu56n>.

Aim: Replicate the relationships between visceral sensitivity and body dissatisfaction and restriction in the general population.

Hypothesis 1: Visceral sensitivity will be positively correlated with body dissatisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Visceral sensitivity will be positively correlated with restriction.

PARTICIPANTS & METHODS

Participants

- Undergraduate students at Ohio University (N=277) who were 69.7% women, with a mean (SD) age of 21.87(6.7), and were primarily non-Hispanic White (84.1%). All participants included in analyses passed attention checks and provided data on key study variables.

Measures

- The 13-item Visceral Sensitivity Index (Visceral Sensitivity Index; Labus et al., 2004) validated by Brown et al. (2021) in an eating disorder population.
- Body dissatisfaction and restriction were assessed using the body dissatisfaction and restriction subscales of the 45-item Eating Pathology Symptoms Inventory (EPSI; Forbush et al., 2013).

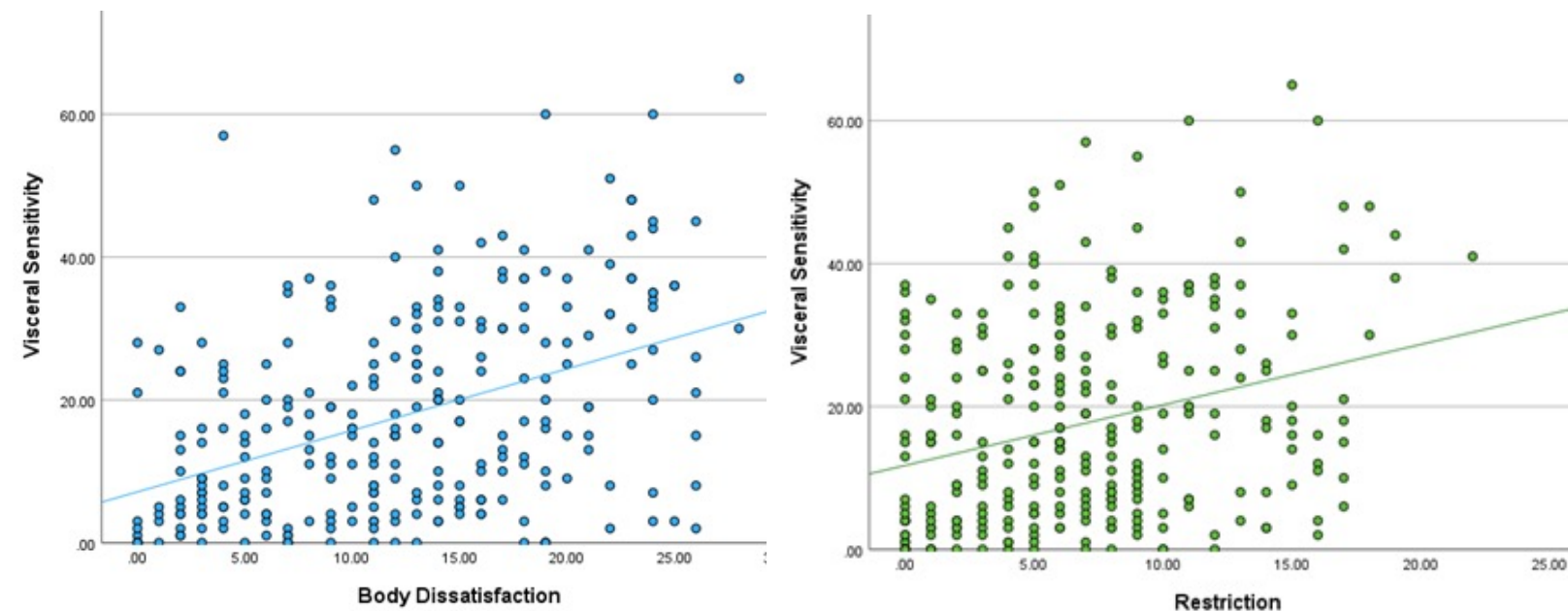
Statistical Analysis

- Skewness and kurtosis were examined for key study variables.
- Zero-order correlations were used to examine the relationships between visceral sensitivity and body dissatisfaction and restrictive eating.

RESULTS

- At the bivariate level, higher levels of visceral sensitivity were moderately associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction ($r = .433, p < .001$).
- Higher levels of visceral sensitivity were moderately associated with higher levels of restrictive eating ($r = .290, p < .001$).

Associations Between Visceral Sensitivity, Body Dissatisfaction, and Restriction



CONCLUSIONS

- We replicated the findings of Brown et al. (2021) in a college population.
- The strength of association was slightly larger for body dissatisfaction and visceral sensitivity compared to individuals with eating disorders.
- The effect size was similar for the relationship between visceral sensitivity and restriction in our sample compared to individuals with eating disorders.
- Future research could examine whether treating visceral sensitivity reduces subclinical eating disorder pathology.
- Future research could examine the directionality of these relationships.

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