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Felicity Waite, Daniel Freeman



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Body image and paranoia

Authors: Waite, Felicity* & Freeman, Daniel

Title: Body image and paranoia

Affiliations: Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Warneford Hospital, UK

* Corresponding author: Felicity Waite, Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Warneford Hospital, OX3 7JX, UK, felicity.waite@psych.ox.ac.uk, 01865 618192

Abstract

Paranoia builds upon feelings of vulnerability. Our clinical experience indicates that negative body image, including concerns regarding weight, may be one source feeling vulnerable and hence raise the risk of paranoia. There has been no empirical test of an association between body image and paranoia. Our aim was to provide the first test of this issue by examining in epidemiologically representative cohorts the cross-sectional associations between proxy measures of body image and paranoia. This was an initial exploration of a potentially important but overlooked issue. Data were used from 5515 participants in the US National Comorbidity Survey-Replication (NCS-R). To validate the findings, the analyses were replicated with 10,113 participants in the US National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescents (NCS-A). Concerns about weight were associated with paranoia in the NCS-R (OR = 1.48, $p=0.006$, CI = 1.123, 1.955) and NCS-A (OR= 1.67, $p<0.001$, CI = 1.490, 1.873). The associations remained significant after controlling for gender and body mass index. The results show that negative body image and paranoia are associated in the general population, consistent with the idea that paranoia may build upon feelings of vulnerability arising from body image concerns. Studies are needed to examine whether there is a causal relationship.

Keywords: psychosis; schizophrenia; obesity; appearance

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