

Psychological Flexibility and Sociocultural Influences in Maladaptive Eating among Adolescents and Young Adults

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INTRO

- **Maladaptive eating** is associated with significant psychological and physical impairment and is especially prevalent during adolescence and young adulthood (1, 2).
- **Sociocultural influences** (e.g., thin-ideal internalization, social pressures) contribute to body dissatisfaction and maladaptive eating, often through social comparison processes (3, 4).
- From an ACT perspective, **psychological flexibility and inflexibility (PF/PI)** are consistently associated with eating-related outcomes, with inflexibility linked to rigid, avoidant, and dysregulated eating patterns (5, 6).
- The **combined and interactive roles** of PI/PF and sociocultural influences on maladaptive eating remain underexplored.

RESULTS

Adolescents	Young Adults	Group Differences
• PI and thin-ideal internalization most strongly linked to maladaptive eating. • Thin-ideal internalization as the most central node.	• Maladaptive eating is primarily linked to perceived social pressure. • PF showed an inverse association with appearance-related information exposure. • Thin-ideal internalization and social pressure were the most central nodes.	• No gender differences. • Higher severity showed stronger overall network connectivity in young adults only.

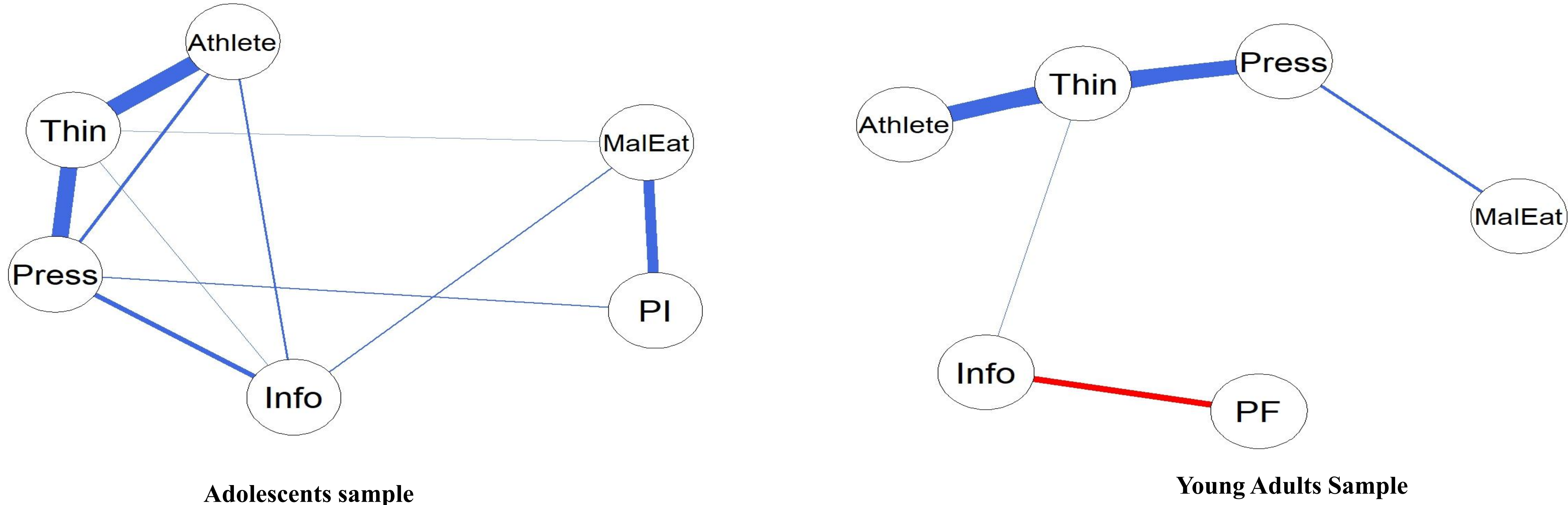
METHODS

Samples	Measures	Analytic Approach
Collected self-report data from: Adolescents <i>n=275 (13-18; via schools)</i> & Young adults <i>n=226 (18-26; via social media)</i>	EAT-26 <i>(Maladaptive eating)</i> SATAQ-3 <i>(Sociocultural influences)</i> AFQ <i>(PI in adolescents)</i> MPFI <i>(PF in young adults)</i>	Estimated network models ↓ to examine associations among all components ↓ Across age and gender by maladaptive eating severity level

DISCUSSION

- Findings indicate **developmental differences** in how PI/PF and sociocultural influences relate to maladaptive eating, with PI more relevant in adolescents and weaker PF associations in young adults (3, 7).
- **PI and PF** appear as related but **distinct constructs**, with PI showing peripheral but meaningful link to maladaptive eating in adolescents (8, 9).
- **Sociocultural influences differed by age:** Adolescents were more linked to thin-ideal internalization and appearance information, while young adults were more linked to perceived social pressures (10, 11).
- Overall, findings highlight **developmentally distinct interaction patterns** between PF/PI and sociocultural factors, supporting a **multidimensional view of maladaptive eating** and underscore the **need for longitudinal research**.

Figure 1
Regularized Partial Correlation Networks of Sociocultural and Psychological Factors Associated with Maladaptive Eating Behaviors across samples.



Notes. Nodes represent study variables: Maladaptive Eating Behaviors (MalEat), Psychological Inflexibility/ Flexibility (PI/PF), Thin Ideal Internalization (Thin), Athlete Ideal Internalization (Athlete), Pressure (Press), Information (Info). Blue edges represent positive association, red edges indicate negative associations.

Any insights, thoughts or comments are welcomed!

SCAN FOR REFERENCES

