
Emotion dysregulation in eating disorders

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Abstract

Several etiological models of eating disorders suggest that people vulnerable to these problems often experience intense negative emotions and turn to food for up-regulating them (Polivy and Herman, 2002; Macth, 2008) and research findings evidence lower emotional awareness and higher difficulties in regulating emotions, higher use of suppression or experiential avoidance and lower use of re-appraisal and problem solving (e.g. Harrison et al., 2009; Bekker, Spoor, 2008; Schmidt, Treasure, 2006) in eating disorders. Since people with AN show extreme personality features of emotional dysregulation and inhibition, which includes social avoidance, anxiousness and affective liability (Holliday, Uher, Landau, Collier, & Treasure, 2006), it could be hypothesized that the emotion dysregulation is the factor that promote both the development and/or maintenance of eating disorders and the comorbidity with other Axis I and Axis II disorders. Consistently with this interpretation, a recent meta-analysis (Aldao et al., 2010) evidence that the severity of the disorder is greatly predicted by emotion suppression. Within this conceptual framework, two studies will be presented evidencing that: 1) both ED patients and people high in eating restriction show higher use of expressive suppression than healthy control groups; 2) emotion suppression predicts the co-occurrence of symptoms of ED and symptoms of insomnia, depression, anxiety in non-clinical samples; 3) emotion suppression predicts physiological (EMG over the corrugators and zygomatic muscles, HR and SCL) responses to emotional stimuli related and not related to the main disorder complied.

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