

Eating disorders across two cultures: does the expression of psychological control vary?

Nerissa Soh, Lois J. Surgenor, Stephen Touyz & Garry Walter

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Abstract

Objective: Because both the expression of eating disorder (ED) symptoms and preferred psychological control styles may be affected by culture, the purpose of the present study was to examine whether the expression of psychological control in women with EDs varies across two cultures.

Method: North European Australian and Chinese Singaporean women (n=117) with anorexia nervosa (n=36), bulimia nervosa (n=13) and eating disorders not otherwise specified (n=3), and without an ED (n=65) recruited in Australia and Singapore completed a multidimensional inventory assessing sense of control, domains of control, preferred means by which to gain control, and motivation for control.

Results: Although the normative control profile for each culture differed slightly, control profiles among those with an ED were very similar across both cultures. However, the directionality and extent of specific aspects of control pathology associated with the presence of an ED differed across cultures. North European Australians with an ED were much more deviant from the cultural norm than their Chinese Singaporean ED counterparts in relation to overall sense of control, methods of gaining control, and control in the domain of body. Chinese Singaporean woman with an ED were much more deviant from the cultural norm than their North European Australian ED counterparts in the domain of control over impulses.

Conclusions: Having an ED powerfully distorts psychological control irrespective of culture. However the degree, directionality, and form of the displacement from normal control styles is also culture dependent. This has

implications for treatments that attempt to redress or correct control issues in people with an ED in other cultures.