

Soh

Name: Nerissa Li-Wey Soh

Title: Psychological Control and Acculturation in Women With and Without Eating Disorders Across Cultures

Review Date: 10/20/04

Overall Significance/Relevance – The presumed relationship between eating disorders and psychological control are less well-established in non-Western populations. Furthermore, it is possible that the control-related issues found in eating disordered patients may be different in non-Western cultures than they are in Western cultures. In the same way that theoretical and empirical work suggests that control strategies and perspectives can be influenced by cultural factors, the proposed study seeks to understand the extent to which the relationship between control constructs and eating disorders also varies as a function of culture.

Does Study Test the Multidimensional Aspects of Control Theory & Research – The study addresses control theory through exploring the relationship between various control dimensions among eating disordered patients across several different cultural groups.

Methodology – Preliminary analyses indicate that different dimensions of control (as measured by the SCI) distinguish eating-disordered and non eating-disorder groups. Cultural groups appear to differ only with respect to specific methods by which control is realized.

Overall Comments/Suggestions –

1. This is an interesting study that adds to our knowledge of the cultural dimensions of control and the interrelationships between culture, control, and eating disorders. It appears that the bulk of the research has already been completed and the applicant seeks funding in order to present findings at an international conference next spring.

Application to "The Control Trust"

Psychological control and acculturation in women with and without eating disorders across cultures

Introduction

The role of psychological control in eating disorders (EDs) has long been discussed in the clinical and theoretical literature (Surgenor, Horn, Plumridge, & Hudson, 2002). For example, it has been hypothesised that the anorexia nervosa (AN) patient's initial need for general self control soon becomes dominated by the need to have control over eating and that control of eating is chosen as the means of control because it provides direct, tangible evidence of self-control (Fairburn, Shafran, & Cooper, 1998).

However, the presumed close relationship between eating disorders and psychological control has not been tested in non-Western populations, which may endorse quite different control styles and mechanisms as pathological (Marks, 1998; Shapiro & Astin, 1998). Likewise, the association between specific ED symptoms and different issues of control found in Western ED populations (Surgenor, Horn, & Hudson, 2003) may not be the same in non-Western populations.

Meaning, expression, and value of control vary across countries and cultures. For example, Western cultures emphasize primary or internal control while Japanese culture emphasizes secondary or external control: European Americans and those of higher socio-economic status report more internal control while the Japanese report more external control (Marks., 1998). Hispanic cultures also commonly hold external locus of control beliefs, which may be stronger in those of a lower SES (Marks., 1998). Chinese students studying in Australia and Asian-Australian migrant students have endorsed "chance" and "powerful others" loci of control more than Anglo-Saxon Australian students and were more external in their locus of control (Leung, 2001). The level of acculturation also affects the perception of control: first generation Japanese students in the USA have been found to score more highly on external control while third or later generation students scored more highly on internal control (Marks., 1998).

In short, in the same way that constructs of psychological control differ across cultures, the traditional associations between such constructs and eating disorders may function differently in these cultures. Indeed, the significance of psychological control in EDs may have more to do with the degree of deviation from the control profile norm of a particular culture than any absolute control profile of eating disorders.

In the context of a larger research programme investigating cross-cultural differences in eating disturbances, the purpose of this study is to describe multidimensional aspects of control both within and across Australian and Asian non-ED and ED women, and to assess the impact of acculturation on the relationship between psychological control and eating disturbance in these groups.

Method

Female participants (n = 158) aged 14-35 years with and without a ED (DSM-IV criteria) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) were recruited from Sydney and Singapore from the following cultural groups:

1. North-European Australian
2. East Asian Australian
3. South-European/East Mediterranean Australian
4. Singaporean Chinese
5. North-European expatriates living in Singapore.

Data regarding multidimensional aspects of psychological control were collected using the Shapiro Control Inventory (Shapiro, 1994), while data regarding acculturation and level of eating disturbance were collected using the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000) and Eating Disorder Evaluation Questionnaire Version (Fairburn & Beglin, 1994).

The relationship between variables was investigated by means of t-tests, correlation and multiple regression. Data analysis will continue over the next 6 months.

Results

Preliminary analysis indicate that multiple dimension of control distinguish ED and non-ED groups, but that cultural groups differ only with respect to specific methods by which control is obtained, along with two specific domains of control. Furthermore, while adherence to traditional cultures was largely unrelated to control issues, greater adherence to a Western culture was significantly associated with specific methods of gaining control, and greater desire for control. The interactions between acculturation and level of eating disturbance in regard to control issues will be discussed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will provide the first description of control issues in women with and without EDs differentiated by culture and level of acculturation within that culture.

Finances

A grant of US\$1000 from the Control Trust would contribute to presenting and travel expenses at the London International Conference on Eating Disorders in April 2005.

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24 January 2005

Control Research Foundation Fund
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Dear Sir or Madam,

As a recent recipient of a grant from the Control Research Foundation Fund, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Fund. The grant will greatly assist in my travelling to present results on eating disorders, culture and control at the 7th International Eating Disorders Conference in London, UK, this April. I look forward to sparking further interest from the conference's delegates on this topic.

Thank you again. Your support of my research is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Nerissa Soh
PhD student

*cc. Professor Stephen Touyz, Principal Supervisor, School of Psychology,
The University of Sydney, Australia*

*cc. Dr Lois Surgenor, Associate Supervisor, Department of Psychological
Medicine, University of Otago, New Zealand*

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> Dear Nerissa,
> Thank you for your application to The Control Trust. Overall, we were very
> impressed by the quality and thoughtfulness that has gone into the work
> you
> have carried out and excited about the possibilities it has for deepening
> our knowledge and understanding of the role of psychological control in
> human health and well being.
>
> We have attached our formal review and believe that the proposal merits
> funding at our maximum amount of \$1000. Congratulations! As stipulated in
> the application, we do ask that you forward to us copies of any conference
> presentations or published work that results from this research.
>
> Someone will be contacting you shortly regarding necessary paperwork, etc.
> to complete prior to receiving the funds. In the meantime, if you have
> any
> questions, don?t hesitate to contact us.
>
> Regards,
> John Astin
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