Implications of Eating Styles: Investigating the Associations between Depression, BMI, and Eating for Physical Reasons
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Introduction

- First-year college students often experience increased depressive symptoms and weight gain.
- Some may eat to cope with the stress of this transition (emotional eating) which puts them at greater risk for weight gain.
- Conversely, students who tend to eat for physical reasons (e.g., eating when you feel hungry) may be less susceptible to weight gain and depressive symptoms.
- Moreover, gender differences in cultural pressures may explain variances in EPR scores.

Aims

1. Examine the relation between EPR and BMI and depressive symptoms.
2. Examine whether the relation between EPR and BMI and Depressive symptoms differs based on gender.

Method

Participants:
- 424 first-year undergraduate students
- 83.7% Female, Age (M=18.91, SD=0.8)

Measures:
- Body Mass Index
- Depressive Symptoms – CES-D10
- Eating Style – IES-2 subscale; α=.737

EPR Items:
1. I find myself eating when I'm feeling emotional (e.g., anxious, depressed, sad), even when I'm not physically hungry.
2. I find myself eating when I am lonely, even when I'm not physically hungry.
3. I use food to help me soothe my negative emotions.
4. I find myself eating when I am stressed out, even when I’m not physically hungry.
5. I am able to cope with my negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, sadness) without turning to food for comfort.
6. When I am bored, I do NOT eat just for something to do.
7. When I am lonely, I do NOT turn to food for comfort.
8. I find other ways to cope with stress and anxiety than by eating.

Results

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting BMI (N = 419)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPR</td>
<td>B 0.90</td>
<td>SE 0.37</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPR x Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
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Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Depressive Symptoms (N = 396)

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>EPR x Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
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Gender Differences in EPR and Depressive Symptoms

Aim 1

- There were significant negative correlations between EPR and depressive symptoms (r=-.385, p<.01) and between EPR and BMI (r=-.116, p<.05).
- EPR accounted for unique variances in both BMI and depressive symptoms.

Aim 2

- Females reported more depressive symptoms (t(396)=1.97, p<.05) and less EPR (t(417)=4.354, p<.001) than males.
- However, gender did not sufficiently moderate the interaction between EPR, depressive symptoms and BMI.

Conclusion

- Higher levels of EPR corresponded with lower levels of reported depressive symptoms and lower BMIs.
- Gender does not seem to play a significant role in the relation between EPR and depressive symptoms nor EPR and BMI.

Discussion

- Support for literature connecting EPR with higher psychological well-being.
- EPR could be important for understanding the mental health of first-year college students regardless of gender.
- Given that EPR robustly corresponded with lower BMIs and lower depressive symptoms, it could also be useful for fostering healthy eating habits.
- Future research should examine EPR in a longitudinal study to strengthen conclusions about its association with depressive symptoms.

References