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ARE ECCENTRIC EATING HABITS A MANIFESTATION OF AN UNDERLYING EATING DISORDER?

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Introduction: Eccentric eating habits (EEH) represent various unusual eating habits that have been widely documented. The estimates about its prevalence range from 20 to 70% depending on the defining criteria. There is disagreement about the nature of EEH, whether it represents a pathology that may develop into an ED or just fussy habits.

Objectives: To examine whether tendencies for EEH are a manifestation of an underlying tendency for EDs.

Aims: To test the hypothesis that a high level of EEH will be related to high scores on the Cognitive Orientation Questionnaire of Eating Disorders (COQ-EDs) which represents tendencies shared by the major EDs and assesses the underlying motivations for EDs.

Methods: Participants were 340 high school students (52% girls, 48% boys), 16-18 years old, from three different schools. They were administered the questionnaire of EEH, the COQ-EDs and the EAT 26 which assesses clinically significant EDs.

Results: Analyses of variance showed significant differences in the COQ-EDs scores between three groups: high scorers on EAT 26, high EEH scorers and low EEH scorers, especially between the first and the last two. A stepwise discriminant analysis provided correct identification of group membership in 77.9 % (versus 33% expected by chance).

Conclusions: The findings disconfirmed the hypothesis. EEH differs from tendencies for actual EDs. In the worst case they may be a mild form of EDs. It is doubtful whether it is necessary or desirable to treat EEH.