

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Predictors of Improved Eating Behaviour Following Body Image Therapy: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Cognitive processes seem to play a vital role in eating disorders and body image. The current study, therefore, examines the impact and change of dysfunctional cognitions during a body image group therapy, which included 41 patients with an eating disorder. Dysfunctional cognitions were assessed with the 'Eating Disorder Cognition Questionnaire' both before and after treatment. Eating disorder psychopathology was also assessed. Results indicate a significant reduction of dysfunctional cognitions relating to 'body and self-esteem', 'dietary restraint', 'eating and loss of control', as well as 'internalisation and social comparison'. Furthermore, the changes in dysfunctional cognitions were associated with a reduction in eating disorder psychopathology. Body image therapy is a worthy complementation to standardised eating disorder treatment programmes as it reduces negative eating related thoughts and changes attitudes towards the body. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and Eating Disorders Association.

Keywords

cognitions; body image; cognitive-behavioural therapy; eating disorders; eating behaviour

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Introduction

The presence of body image disturbances is considered a main characteristic of patients with anorexia and bulimia nervosa (Cash & Deagle, 1997; Stewart & Williamson, 2004a, 2004b). An excessive influence of body shape and weight on self-evaluation is indicated among the diagnostic criteria of the DSM-IV for anorexia and bulimia nervosa, while additionally for anorexia nervosa a distorted body image perception is described (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Body image as a theoretical construct, is thought to be multidimensional consisting of perceptual, cognitive,

affective and behavioural components (Thompson, 2004). Dysfunction in one or more component can lead to specific effects such as: Overestimation of one's own body dimensions, (Cash and Deagle, 1997; Farrell, Lee, & Shafran, 2005; Vocks, Legenbauer, Rüddel, & Troje, 2007), negative feelings and thoughts towards the body (Cooper & Fairburn, 1992; Tuschen-Caffier, Vögele, Bracht, & Hilbert, 2003; Vocks, Wächter, Wucherer, & Kosfelder, 2008), as well as body avoidance and checking behaviour (Reas, Whisenhunt, Netemeyer, & Williamson, 2002; Rosen, Srebnik, Saltzberg, & Wendt, 1991; Shafran, Fairburn, Robinson, & Lask, 2004). Consequently, in the therapy of eating disorders,