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Emotion Regulation Tendencies Moderate Momentary Associations Between Sadness, Binge Urges, and Overeating

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ABSTRACT

Background: Eating disorders (EDs) are notably adverse, and previous research emphasizes that analysis of momentary triggers may be useful in determining the factors that maintain ED psychopathology. Negative affect (NA) is one momentary trigger of special interest in regard to binge eating tendencies. While current literature differs on the precise mechanisms by which NA maintains ED psychopathology, emotional regulation has been nevertheless implicated in encouraging binge eating behaviors. The present study explores correlations among sadness, binge urges, and overeating, and assesses emotional avoidance and emotional awareness as potential moderators of these relationships. *Method:* Participants (N = 34) with moderate to severe depression were recruited from across the United States. Participants completed baseline measures at onset followed by four ecological momentary assessments per day sent to their mobile phones for 20 days. The relationships among sadness, binge urges, and overeating were tested through multilevel modeling in R. *Results:* Within- and between-person sadness levels were each significantly associated with momentary urges to binge eat and overeating. Emotional awareness was nonsignificant, while emotional avoidance emerged as a significant moderator of these relationships. *Discussion:* These findings provide support for the affect regulation model of binge eating and for the escape theory, centralizing the role of sadness in maintenance of binge eating psychopathology. Targeting emotional avoidance and testing exposure to aversive emotions should be considered for their efficacy in treatment. Future research should assess these relationships in the ED population and more extensively analyze the interactions between NA and emotional avoidance.

KEYWORDS: eating disorder, emotion regulation, emotional avoidance, emotional awareness, negative affect, sadness, depression, binge eating, overeating, ecological momentary assessment