

ABNORMALITY: CUTTS & BARIOS
PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF BULIMIA NERVOSA

Aim: to investigate whether fear of weight gain (distorted perception) is more prevalent in people with bulimia than in "normal" conditions

Procedures:

- Thirty females aged 18-25 were assigned a group made up of individuals with bulimia or control group on the basis of questionnaires and interviews.
- All were tested in a laboratory as they listened to two descriptions: one of a neutral scene (sitting in a library) and one depicting weight gain (imagining they have gained 5 lbs). Both scenes were described by a man and participants were asked to imagine themselves in this situation
- Their accompanying physiological responses were recorded by measuring facial muscle activity, heart rate and skin resistance (indicates stress).
- They were also asked to report their own reactions using a self-report checklist, and their overt behaviour was rated by observers

Findings:

- Both groups of participants showed similar responses to the neutral scene but different responses to the weight gain scene. People with bulimia had higher physiological activity when imagining the weight gain. They also reported greater subjective distress and their overt behaviour was rated as being higher

Conclusions:

- The findings support the view that fear of weight gain may be a factor in bulimia.

Criticisms:

- The concept of faulty cognitions may also offer us a form of treatment for the disorder
- It may be that certain personality characteristics co-vary with faulty cognitions. It could be that rather than the faulty perceptions which are the cause of the disorder