

Overton, A., Selway, S., Strongman, K., & Houston, M. (2005). Eating disorders – the regulation of positive as well as negative emotion experience. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 12, 39-56.

Disordered eating behaviors are often conceptualized as maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. The present study investigated links between emotional experience, schematic belief systems, and psychological themes associated with eating disorders. In contrast to the majority of studies, which focus on just one or two emotions and use nonclinical samples, this study compared the full range of emotional experience in women with eating disorders to a control group. Measures used include the Differential Emotional Scale-IV, Young's Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire, and Eating Disorder Inventory-2. The study provides the first empirical evidence that women diagnosed with eating disorders report experiencing pleasant as well as unpleasant emotions more frequently than do controls. A surprising finding was that pleasant emotions (joy, interest, surprise) correlated with eating disorder themes (EDI-2 subscales) more consistently than unpleasant emotions in the eating disorder group, while the reverse was true of the control group. Also of note, eating-disordered women reported significantly less anger and similar levels of fear vs. controls. While eating-disordered women scored more highly than do controls on all maladaptive schema (suggesting high levels of distress in women with eating disorders), the pattern of correlations between schema and emotion experience was distinctly different for each group and counterintuitive for the eating disorder group. In particular, pleasant emotion was highly correlated with maladaptive schema in the eating-disordered group but not in the control group. These marked group differences in the pattern of relationships between emotion experience, eating disorder themes, and belief systems suggest that it is not valid to draw conclusions about eating disorders from research that employs only nonclinical samples. The authors discuss these findings, and suggest that women with eating disorders are proficient at using disordered eating behaviors to manipulate their experience of both positive and negative emotional states, and that this dynamic should be recognized as an important maintenance factor.