

Poster for “Reconstructing Health Psychology”

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Memories of meal-eating phenomenology in health and

bulimia nervosa. JANET L. GUSS, HARRY R. KISSILEFF, B. TIMOTHY WALSH,
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Method. Healthy young women who professed not to be dieting and female patients who had been diagnosed as suffering from bulimia nervosa were asked to write down briefly how they remembered or imagined that they felt during each of the following scenarios: after eating “a meal that disagreed with you”, “the largest meal ever”, “a normal dinner” and “a small snack”.

Results. Of the 107 different substantive words written by the patients and the 509 by the healthy controls, 82% could be assigned by purely literal and lexical criteria to one of five categories, named by their commonest word: satisfied, stuffed, lethargic, ill and anxious. However, the term “stuffed” is not including among the ratings in general use to assess intensity of appetite for food. Investigators should find out their participants’ own terminology before seeking to elicit quantitative judgments.

Ratings of states around meals in sufferers from eating disorders do not generally include mood. Yet, across the scenarios, words expressing negative affect (ill, anxious) were used relatively more frequently by patients (65 of 107 word occurrences) than by controls (132 of 509 word occurrences), whereas controls used terms indicative of positive affect (satisfied, full) more frequently (326 of 509 occurrences) than patients (41 of 107 occurrences), a statistically highly significant contrast, $\chi^2(4) = 86.4$, $p < 0.0001$).

Conclusion. This result supports other indications that those who binge and purge associate malaise with eating, rather than the pleasure or at least satisfaction that many healthy people experience.