Introduction

• About 1 million Canadians are diagnosed with an eating disorder.
• Threats to body image can be considered as manifestations of stress, and like any other stressor, should be coped with effectively to avoid negative effects.
• Previous cross-cultural stress coping studies in response to general, daily life stressors found that:
  → European North Americans tend to endorse primary coping (changing the environment to fit own needs).
  → East Asians tend to use secondary coping mechanisms (adjusting self to the environment).
  → East Asians tend to use more avoidance coping strategies (distracting oneself from the stressor).
→ European North Americans tend to use more active, approach-oriented coping strategies (cognitive efforts aimed at finding a solution to the problem, understanding its causes, and accepting it).
→ The East Asian preference for secondary emotion-focused coping is explained by deeply-rooted values of maintaining interpersonal harmony, which may be disrupted through the usage of more direct strategies.
• No studies have examined cultural differences in body image coping strategies.

Table 1: Examples of items from the BICSI:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Strategy Used</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance Fixing</td>
<td>I make a special effort to hide or cover up what’s troublesome about my looks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Rational Acceptance</td>
<td>I tell myself that there are more important things than what I look like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>“I make a special effort to hide or cover up what’s troublesome about my looks”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expected Results

Cultural Differences in Usage of Coping Strategies in Response to Threat to Body Image

Methods

Participants:
~100 European Canadian students at the University of Alberta
~100 East Asian international students at the University of Alberta

Procedure:
- Participants will complete the Body Image Coping Strategies Inventory (BICSI) by indicating on a 7-point Likert scale, how likely they are to use each coping strategy in response to a threat to body image.

Examples of items from the BICSI:
- “I make a special effort to hide or cover up what’s troublesome about my looks”
- “I tell myself that there are more important things than what I look like”

Implications

• Given the prevalence and severity of eating disorders, it is essential to gain more knowledge on coping strategies to intervene early.
• Mental health practitioners, especially those practicing in multicultural societies like Canada treating diverse populations, would benefit from the current research, as it offers insight into cultural norms and behaviour. This cultural awareness is essential to provide high-quality, well-rounded treatment of body/eating related disorders by understanding clients’ cultural values, needs, and coping skills.
• The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) places a strong emphasis on cultural competencies in practice.
• The study helps close the gap in literature by studying an area not covered in cross-cultural psychology.
• Addresses the lack of research from non-WEIRD (Western, Economic, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) countries.

References