Reviewer's report

Title: Reduced mentalizing in patients with bulimia nervosa and features of borderline personality disorder: A case-control study

Version: 1 Date: 21 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Tiffany Brown

Reviewer's report:

Summary: The current manuscript examines impairments in mentalization individuals with bulimia nervosa compared to controls. The manuscript benefits from a clinically relevant topic and is very well-written. However, there are a few areas of the manuscript that could be improved. Below are aspects of the manuscript that are worth revision:

Introduction

* On page 4, the authors introduce the notion that previous studies of mentalization have not controlled for BPD symptoms. I do think that there could be a better transition from the two proposed mentalizing groups to the point re: BPD. Perhaps this could include even just a brief statement regarding the importance of helping identify additional factors that may account for high and low mentalization in BN groups.

* The first sentence of the 4th paragraph on page 4, beginning with "In this respect…” is a bit confusing as currently written and could benefit from revision.

Methods

* I appreciate the authors' explanation regarding the amount of missing data (as noted by the Editor). I do echo the Editor's concern regarding the concerns regarding the amount of missing data and whether this data is not missing at random. Adding a test, such as Little's MCAR, may help mitigate some of this concern.

* I also echo Dr. Amianto's concern regarding the interpretation of the results, not accounting for mood symptoms. While I agree that excluding BN participants with MDD would decrease the external validity of the results, the authors do have the DASS-21 (as mentioned in the response). Therefore, it seems that the authors could use the DASS-21 depression scale scores as a covariate in analyses - especially since the total DASS-21 did correlate with the RFQ and was higher in the BN group. This seems to imply that the DASS could be accounting in part for the group effects found.

* In regard to Dr. Amianto’s comment, it would be helpful to add the lack of information on age of onset/AN history to the limitations section.
* On page 7, the authors noted that for a proportion of participants, confirmation of HC status was checked directly by asking participants if they had symptoms of eating problems or psychiatric treatment. Was a structured clinical interview conducted to determine this? If so, which one? If the interview was unstructured, what were the specific questions asked to determine that the participants did not have an eating disorder?

* On page 7, the authors note that post-hoc power analyses revealed that n=25 HC resulted in adequate power; however, earlier the authors noted that n=84 total (~n=42 HC) participants were needed for adequate power. It would be helpful for the authors to clarify this discrepancy.

Discussion

* On page 12, lines 51-54, the authors note that BN patients showed less complex object representations (characterized by physical appearance/body qualities and less by personality/psychological features). Given the strong overlap, I wonder if the authors could comment/tie this result into the larger literature on self-objectification (e.g., the tendency to evaluate oneself by physical versus non-physical means) in BN/eating disorders and how mentalization in this capacity may relate to body image disturbance in BN.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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