



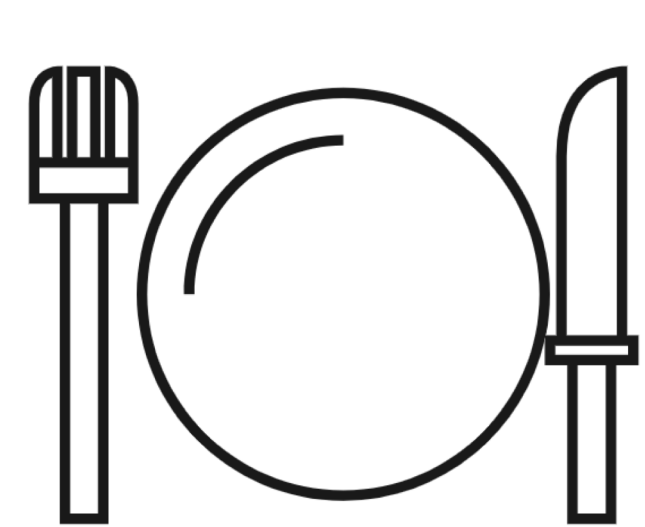
The Clash of Culture and Cuisine: Conflicting Expectations and Disordered Eating in Chinese Adolescent Women

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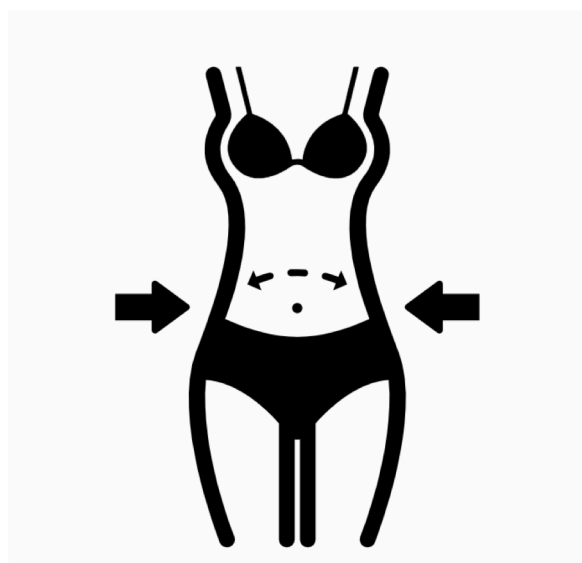
Introduction

- Prior research efforts on body dissatisfaction and eating disorders have largely focused on western populations. ¹
- However, a growing body of research suggests that disordered eating attitudes and behaviors are appearing more frequently amongst Chinese individuals. ³
- There still lacks consensus amongst current researchers as to whether Chinese individuals differ from western counterparts in terms of etiology and symptom expression, suggesting a **need for research on culturally specific risk factors for body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.**

Conflicting expectations as a culturally specific risk factor



On the one hand, Chinese individuals are expected to uphold cultural eating norms of eating more as a sign of respect to one's host. ²



On the other hand, normative thinness in Asian contexts ⁴ and thin ideal perpetuation from western media contribute to a simultaneous pressure for Chinese women to be thin.

Aims

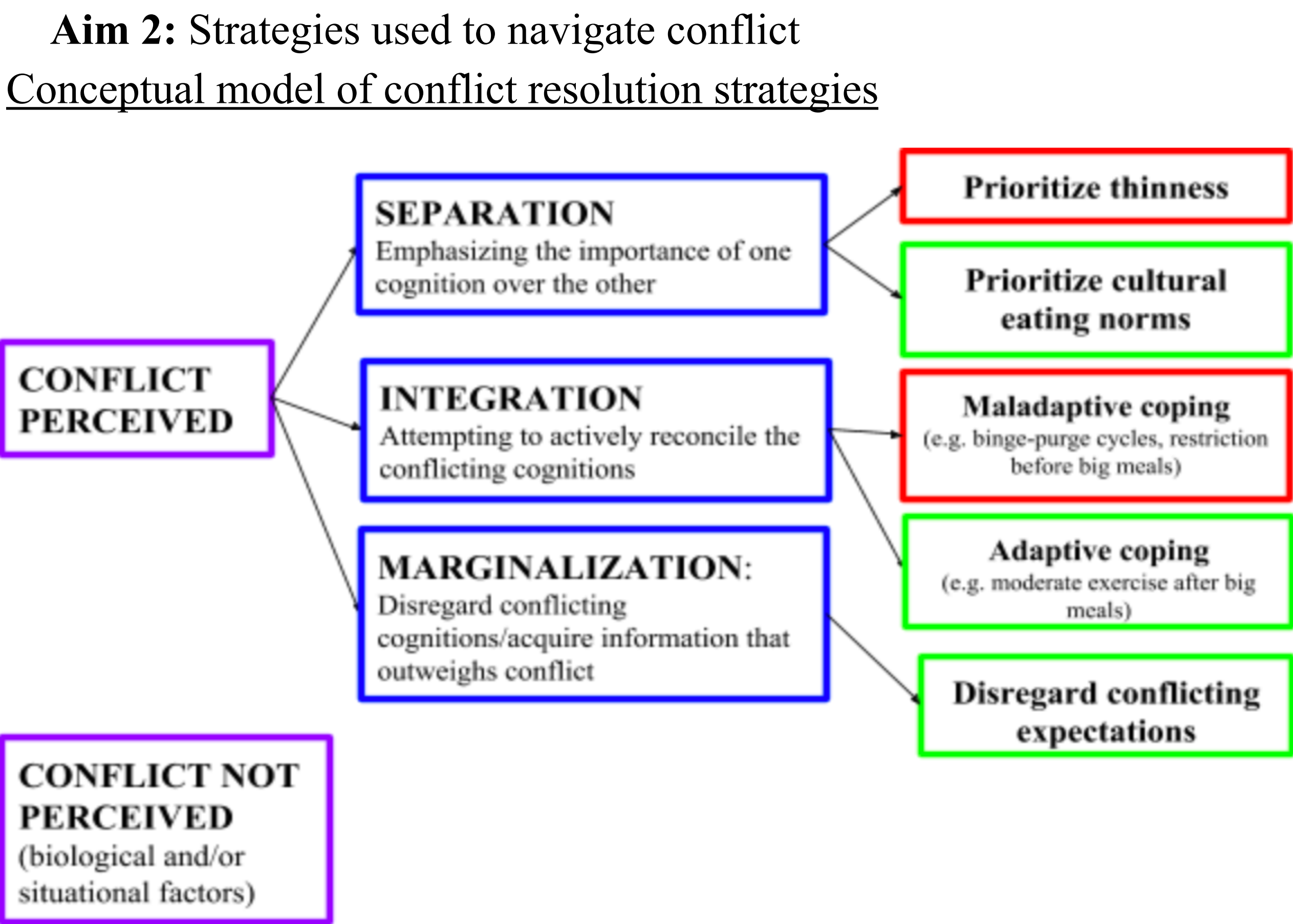
- Explore **conflicting expectations as a culturally specific risk factor** for body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in Chinese adolescent women.
- Create **explanatory model** of strategies used to navigate these expectations, and implications of these strategies.
- Identify **risk and protective factors** for the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating attitudes and behaviors in Chinese adolescent women.

Method

- Participants: Thirty-four Chinese women between ages 18 and 22 ($M_{Age} = 20.7$ years, $SD = 1.06$ years)
- Recruitment criteria: between ages 18 and 22, identify as female, parents of Chinese descent.
- Interview conducted via Skype or email correspondence.
- Topics included: Perceived cultural rules surrounding eating, the perceived relationship between these rules and expectations of their body shape, and how this relationship impacted their emotions.
 - Sample items: “What does food and the act of eating symbolize in your culture?”, “Do you ever feel that there is a conflict between cultural expectations around eating and expectations about body shape?”
- Responses were separately coded by two researchers, and consensus on identified themes were discussed in two coding meetings.

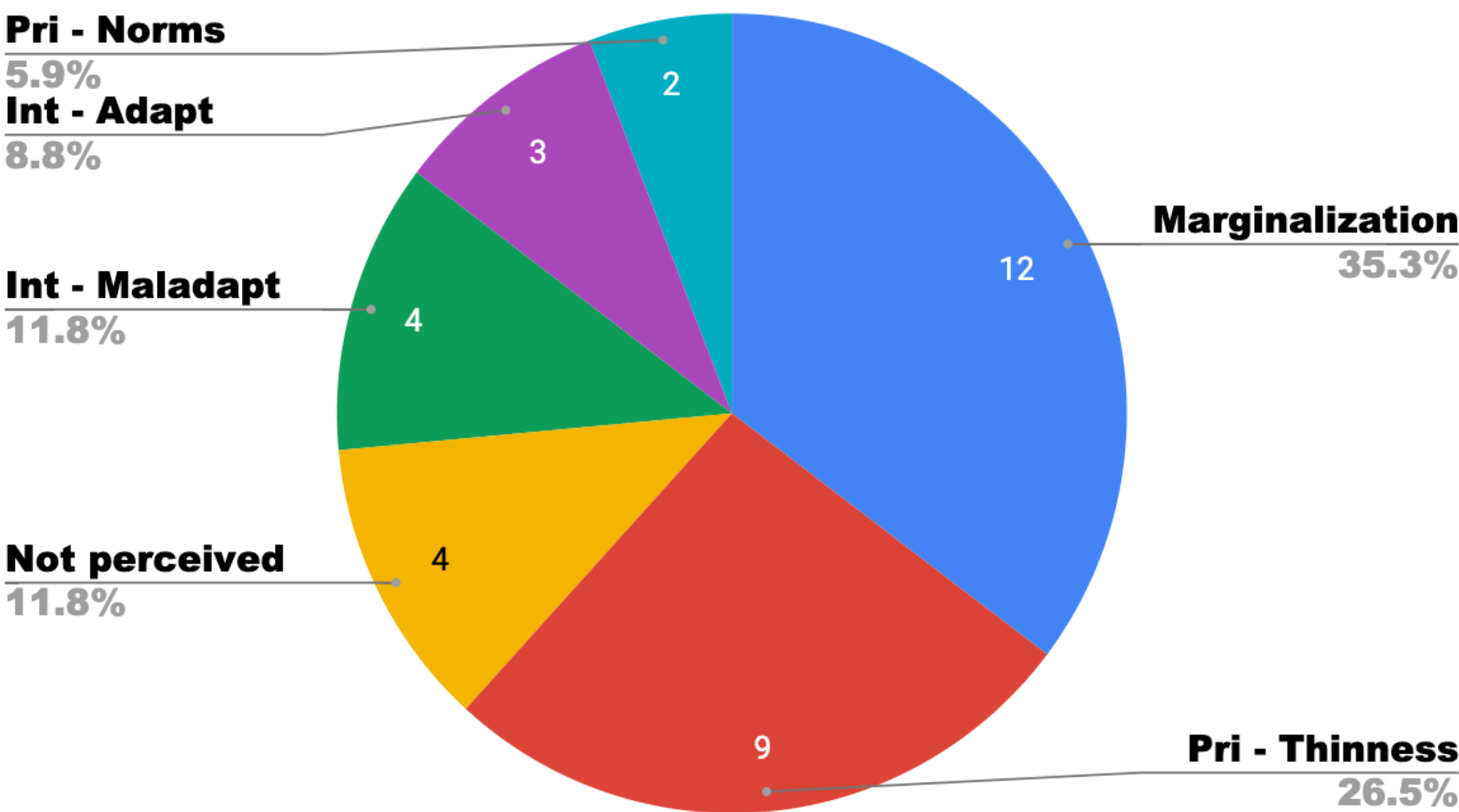
Results

- Aim 1:** Are conflicting expectations perceived as a significant source of distress for Chinese adolescent women?
- 82% of women in our sample reported perceiving a sense of conflict.



****Red** indicates maladaptive outcome, **green** indicates adaptive outcome.

Conflict resolution strategies endorsed by present sample



Aim 2: What are the implications of these strategies on emotional outcomes?

- Majority of sample fell in the “slightly affected” (12 women) or “moderately affected” (13 women) categories** - not actively engaging in disordered eating behaviors but still experiencing a significant negative affect resulting from body image perceptions.
- 4 out of the 5 women in the “strongly affected” category endorsed thinness prioritization pathway**, supporting hypothesis this pathway would be most maladaptive and result in more negative emotional outcomes.
- 7 out of 13 women in the “moderately affected” category endorsed marginalization pathway**, which was originally hypothesized to be adaptive. Despite reporting developing coping mechanisms to resolve sense of conflict, these women still reported experiencing unresolved body image insecurities.

Aim 3: Risk and protective factors for body dissatisfaction and disordered eating

Risk factors	Protective factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narrowly defined standards of femininity and attractiveness• Physical features as key determinants of life fulfillment• Perceived lack of control over weight or shape• Conditional satisfaction with body weight or shape• Stress in other domains of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceived control over body weight or shape• Positive social reinforcement• Past experience with body image concerns/disordered eating• Genetic factors

Implications

- 1) Body satisfaction may not be contingent on absolute weight** - greater concern over physical features and relative proportions of body parts.
- 2) Conditional acceptance of body weight or shape is a key risk factor for development of disordered eating** – Changing in dietary habits and activity levels during rapid economic development in China, fear of prospective weight gain, and lack of understanding about how to emotionally, mentally and physically cope with weight changes = higher risk of developing body image and eating disturbances.

Suggested components of future interventions

- **Concrete methods** of promoting holistic health (i.e. Physical, mental, emotional and social)
- Ways to **approach bodily sensations with a sense of curiosity rather than fear** - promote decreased avoidance behaviors surrounding physical discomfort. ⁵
- **Mindfulness practices broaden focus in life to be less weight-centric** - address conditional acceptance of body weight/shape and unacknowledged body dissatisfaction.

Limitations and future directions

- **Inability to explore other themes/risk factors; small sample size**
→ Qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of Chinese women should be carried out with greater frequency.

References

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Further information

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