

How Do You Diet?: Exploring a Healthy Eater Identity and Its Relationship with Body Dissatisfaction and Exercise

Abbey E. Hammell (Amanda M. Brouwer Ph.D.)

Introduction

Healthy Eating and Dieting

- ❖ In 2012, 23% of women reported being on a diet¹
- ❖ Most women on a diet show maladaptive weight loss behaviors *rather than increasing healthy food*^{1,2}
- ❖ Media messages might be to blame as they:
 - ❖ correlate with obesity and negative body image, possibly leading to disordered eating behaviors³
 - ❖ raise social expectations of body image and may influence disordered eating⁴
- ❖ These factors may influence how one perceives what it means to be a healthy eater
- ❖ Therefore, I explored the relationship between a healthy eater identity, dieting behaviors and attitudes, disparity between ideal and actual weight, and physical activity.

Hypotheses

- ❖ Healthy eater identity will correlate positively with physical activity level
- ❖ Healthy eater identity will correlate negatively with the disparity between ideal and actual weight due to the participant's satisfaction with their bodies
- ❖ Healthy eater identity will correlate negatively with restrictive eating behaviors

Discussion

- ❖ Results suggest that the closer someone approaches their ideal weight, the more they identify with being a healthy eater
 - ❖ Women may be equating healthy eating behaviors with restricting food intake rather than increasing their intake of healthy foods
 - ❖ They may also perceive that they are eating healthier if their actual weight more closely resembles their ideal weight
 - ❖ The strong relationship between healthy eater identity and physical activity suggests women may see themselves as a healthy eater if they exercise more
- ❖ Contrary to the hypothesis, healthy eater identity positively correlated with restrictive eating habits, suggesting that women may be equating a healthy eater identity with restricting food intake and going on a diet rather than increasing their intake of healthy foods such as fruits or vegetables as a healthy eater identity might suggest.
- ❖ Interventions could focus on the problem of disordered eating and change the way that people think about healthy eating by putting more focus on overall body health by eating the best foods for one's body rather than restricting food intake, which can sometimes be unhealthy for the body
- ❖ Further studies might focus on cognitive perceptions of the definition of a healthy diet

Methods

Participants

- ❖ 79 College Women
 - ❖ Ages 15-53
 - ❖ $M=22.92, SD=6.92$
 - ❖ 79.7% Caucasian, 7.6% African American, 5.1% Asian, 7.6% other
- ❖ Physical Activity Level:
 - ❖ Low = 21.5%
 - ❖ Moderate = 46.8%
 - ❖ Intense = 31.6%

Procedure

- ❖ Participants completed a survey
- ❖ Actual and ideal weight were measured

Measures

- ❖ Demographics: Age, school year, relationship status, race
- ❖ Restrained Eating Scale (0-35)²
- ❖ Healthy-Eater Identity Measure (0-7)¹
- ❖ Physical activity level: 3 category scale
- ❖ Weight disparity
 - ❖ Actual - Ideal weight

¹Herman & Polivy (1975)
²Strachan & Brawley (2008)

Analysis

- ❖ A secondary analysis of a larger study exploring healthy eating behaviors was conducted
- ❖ Spearman's and Pearson's bivariate correlations were performed to explore relationships among variables.

Results

- ❖ The relationship between healthy eater identity and:
 - ❖ Physical activity was strong, positive and significant
 - ❖ Weight disparity was moderate, negative and significant
 - ❖ Restrictive eating habits was moderate, positive and significant

	M	SD
BMI	25.87	6.54
Healthy Eater Identity	4.93	1.24
Weight Disparity	18.79	18.18
Restrictive Eating	14.75	5.03



	1	2	3
1. Healthy Eater Identity			
2. Physical Activity	.46***		
3. Weight Disparity	-.28*	-.28*	
4. Restrictive Eating	.31**	.16	.43***

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001