Abstract

Can Eating Behaviour Traits Be Explained by Underlying, Latent Factors? An Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis [†]

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† Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

Abstract: Eating Behaviour Traits (EBTs) are psychological constructs developed to explain patterns of eating behaviour, including factors that motivate people to (over or under) eat. There is a need to align and clarify their unique contributions and harmonise the understanding they offer for human eating behaviour. Therefore, the current study examined whether 18 commonly cited EBTs could be explained by underlying, latent factors (domains of eating behaviour). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify latent factors, and these factors were validated using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). A total of 1279 participants including the general public and members of a weight management programme were included in the analysis (957 females, 317 males, 3 others, 2 prefer not to say), with a mean age of 54 years (median = 57 years, SD = 12.03) and a mean BMI of 31.93 kg/m^2 (median = 30.86, SD = 6.00). The participants completed 8 questionnaires which included 18 commonly cited EBTs and the dataset was split at random with a 70/30 ratio to conduct the EFA (n = 893) and CFA (n = 383). The results supported a four-factor model which indicated that EBTs can be organised into four domains: reactive, restricted, emotional, and homeostatic eating. The four-factor model also significantly predicted self-reported BMI, weight change and perceived stress. Future research should test whether this factor structure is replicated in more diverse populations, and including other EBTs, to advance these domains of eating as a unifying framework for studying individual differences in human eating behaviour.

Keywords: eating behaviour; obesity; reactive eating; restricted eating; homeostatic eating; emotional eating

Author Contributions: C.D. performed the data analysis, interpreted the data, and created the written article. All authors critically revised the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leeds (reference number: PSYC-338/904, 11 May 2022).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data and code for this study will be made available on request. The corresponding author has full access to the data reported in the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: James Stubbs consults for Slimming World UK through The University of Leeds, a wholly owned subsidiary of the University of Leeds.

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