

## Introduction

Food preoccupation includes (Tapper & Pothos, 2010) :

- Having frequent, sometimes distracting, thoughts about food
- Associating negative thoughts with food and eating

Age and body mass index have been associated with fear of fat and food preoccupation (Bjornelv et al., 2011; Shapiro et al., 1997).

People high in food preoccupation often report dieting (Jones & Rogers, 2003).

- It is assumed that the mechanism underlying the relationship between food preoccupation and dieting is that restriction makes forbidden foods more desirable.
- In other words, dieters are preoccupied with food because they cannot have it (Birch & Fisher, 1998).

However, there are other possible mechanisms underlying this relationship, including individuals' personal weight concerns (e.g., fear of fat).

## The Current Study

**Aim 1:** To explore the relationships between age and body mass index (BMI) and frequency of food thoughts and negative food preoccupation.

**Aim 2:** To examine whether fear of fat mediates the relation between dieting and food thought frequency and between dieting and negative food preoccupation.

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

125 college students participated

- 23 men; Mean age = 24.3 years (SD = 6.7); range = 17.4-50.8 years
- Mean BMI = 24.2 (SD = 5.0); range = 16.5-42.0

### Measures

Food Preoccupation Questionnaire (Tapper & Pothos, 2010).

- Frequency of thoughts about food
  - Ex. "I spend a lot of time thinking about food."
  - 3 items;  $\alpha = .89$
- Negative food preoccupation
  - Ex. "I hate being distracted with thoughts about food."
  - 9 items;  $\alpha = .85$
- Scale= 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*)

Antifat Attitudes Questionnaire (Crandall, 1994).

- Fear of fat subscale
  - Ex. "One of the worst things that could happen to me would be if I gained 25 pounds."
  - 3 items;  $\alpha = .80$
- Scale= 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*)

Dieting

- "Are you currently on a diet to lose weight?"
- "Have you ever been on a diet to lose weight?"
- Scale= 0 (*no*) to 1 (*yes*)

## Results

**Aim 1:**

Table 1  
*Associations Between Age, BMI, and Key Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	-					
2. BMI	.33**	-				
3. Dieting	.04	.39**	-			
4. Fear of Fat	-.06	.13	.38**	-		
5. Frequency of Food Thoughts	-.10	.01	.09	.22*	-	
6. Negative Food Preoccupation	-.12	.13	.20*	.46**	.38**	-

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .001$

**Aim 2:** Mediation was examined with Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step regression procedure.

**For food thought frequency:**

Step 1: Dieting was not significantly related to frequency of food thoughts  $F(1,117) = .90, p = .34$ .

- Thus, mediation was not further examined.

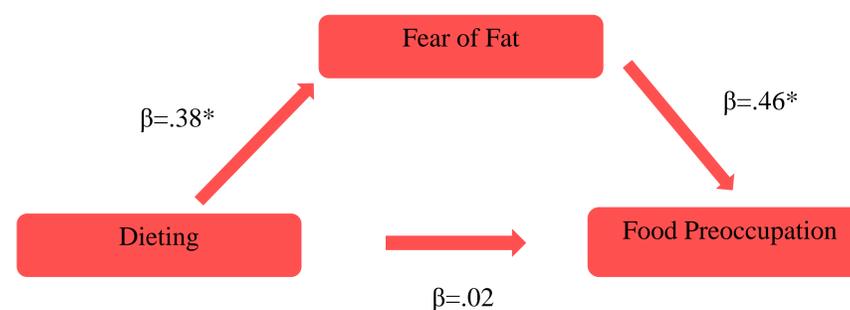
**For negative food preoccupation:**

Step 1: Dieting predicted negative food preoccupation,  $F(1,117) = 4.86, p = .03, R^2 = .04$ .

Step 2: Dieting predicted fear of fat,  $F(1,117) = 19.58, p < .001, R^2 = .14$ .

Step 3: Fear of fat predicted negative food preoccupation after controlling for dieting,  $F(1,117) = 16.78, p < .001, R^2 = .22$

Step 4: Dieting did not predict negative food preoccupation when fear of fat was included in the regression equation.



\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .001$

## Discussion

Age was not related to food preoccupation or dieting in this sample.

- Future research should examine food preoccupation and dieting in adolescents to determine when these constructs develop.

BMI was not related to food preoccupation.

Fear of fat mediated the relationship between negative food preoccupation and dieting, but not between food thought frequency and dieting.

- Personal weight concerns may be the mechanism through which this relationship occurs.
- Future research should examine fear of fat and forbidden foods as mechanisms relating negative food preoccupation and dieting.
- More work is needed to understand food thought frequency.

Future longitudinal research is needed to examine the developmental trajectory of dieting, fear of fat, and negative food preoccupation.

## References

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