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Can orthorexia really be healthy?

Using positive body image to differentiate between orthorexia nervosa and healthy orthorexia

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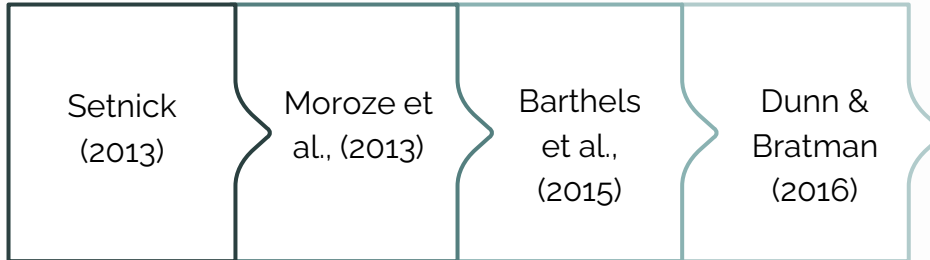
Elly Anastasiades & Dr Marios Argyrides

“a pathological obsession with eating the right foods”

(Bratman 1997)

- Orthorexia is not listed as an official mental disorder
- No consensus diagnostic criteria

Proposed criteria



1. an obsessive focus on dietary practices believed to promote optimum wellbeing
2. Consequent, clinically significant impairment

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- Prevalence rates up to 88% (Dunn & Bratman, 2016)
 - Vegans/vegetarians score higher on orthorexia scores (Brytek-Matera, 2019; Ferreira & Coimbra, 2020; Heiss, Timko & Hormes 2020)
 - Risk of pathologizing and stigmatizing of diets e.g., veganism (Koeder, 2021; Valente et al., 2021)
 - Complaints of over-medicalization
 - Exacerbated by use of social media platforms
 - Belief in/enthusiasm for a diet is NOT a form of disordered eating (Bratman 2017)

Important to distinguish between when healthy eating is **healthy**

and when it is **pathological**



Orthorexi

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A healthy interest with diet, independent of psychopathology (eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and negative affect),

Inversely associated psychopathology measures

**Healthy
Orthorexia**

vs

**Orthorexia
Nervosa**

A pathological preoccupation with a healthy diet, which has a negative social and emotional impact

Self-punishment, self-isolation and guilt

Positively correlated with psychopathology measures



Healthy orthorexia and orthorexia nervosa are **distinct eating styles that do not lie on the same continuum**

- Body image concerns are a major **risk factor** for **eating disorders** & a target for prevention and clinical interventions (Stice, Marti, & Durrant, 2011)
- Focus on reduction of negative body image is limited - does not predict/enhance wellbeing (Tylka & Piran, 2019)
- Research on positive body image – guiding search for protective factors – prevention and treatment of eating disorders (Piran 2015, 2016, 2017)

Positive Body Image

An overarching love and respect for the body:

- Appreciating unique beauty & functions
- Accepting and admiring despite flaws
- Feeling comfortable, confident and happy
- Emphasizing assets over imperfections
- Interpreting incoming information in a body protective manner

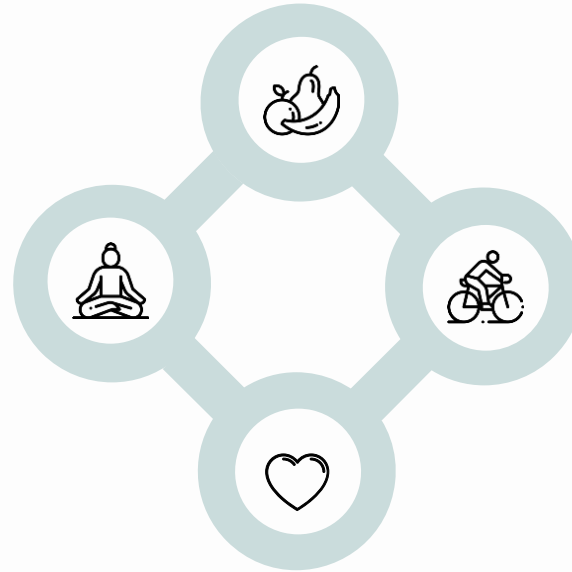


Intuitive Eating

Adaptive form of eating characterized by a strong connection with internal physiological hunger and satiety cues

Experience of Embodiment

The lived experience of engagement of the body with the world



Body Appreciation

Having favorable opinions of the body regardless of actual physical appearance

Body Functionality

Everything that the body can do or is capable of doing, including functions related to internal processes

- **Positive relationships with indices of wellbeing**
 - **Inverse relationships with disordered eating**
- (cf., Tylka & Piran, 2019)**

Current study

To explore whether positive body image differs for healthy orthorexia and orthorexia nervosa



SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

- Cross sectional survey study
 - Online sample of 838 participants (61.8% women)
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 40.24$, $SD = 14.45$
 - Measures counterbalanced to control for order effects
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MEASURES

- **Demographics:** age, gender, BMI
 - **Orthorexia:** Teruel Orthorexia Scale (Barrada & Roncero, 2018), $\alpha = .83$ (OrNe), $\alpha = .83$ (HeOr)
 - **Intuitive Eating:** Intuitive Eating Scale-2 (Tylka & Kroon van Diest, 2013), $\alpha = .87$
 - **Body Appreciation:** Body Appreciation Scale-2 (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015), $\alpha = .95$
 - **Body Functionality:** Functionality Appreciation Scale (Alleva et al., 2017), $\alpha = .91$
 - **Experience of Embodiment:** Experience of Embodiment Scale (Piran et al., 2020), $\alpha = .94$
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Healthy Orthorexia

Intuitive eating: $r = .14, p < .001$

Body appreciation: $r = .19, p < .001$

Functionality appreciation: $r = .22, p < .001$

Experience of embodiment : $r = .13, p < .001$



Orthorexia nervosa

Intuitive eating: $r = -.18, p < .001$

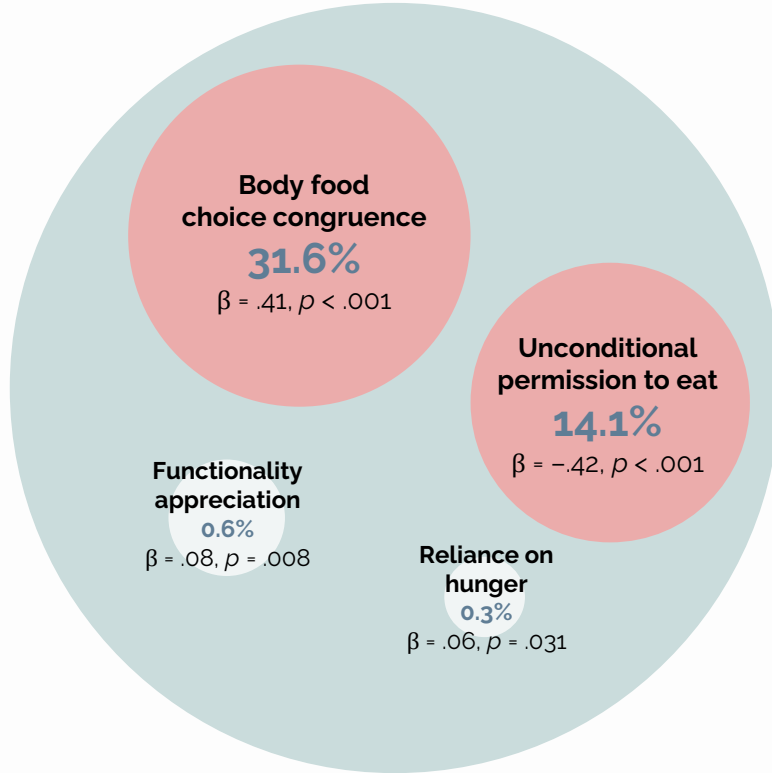
Body appreciation: $r = -.18, p < .001$

Functionality appreciation: $r = -.16, p < .001$

Experience of embodiment: $r = -.37, p < .001$

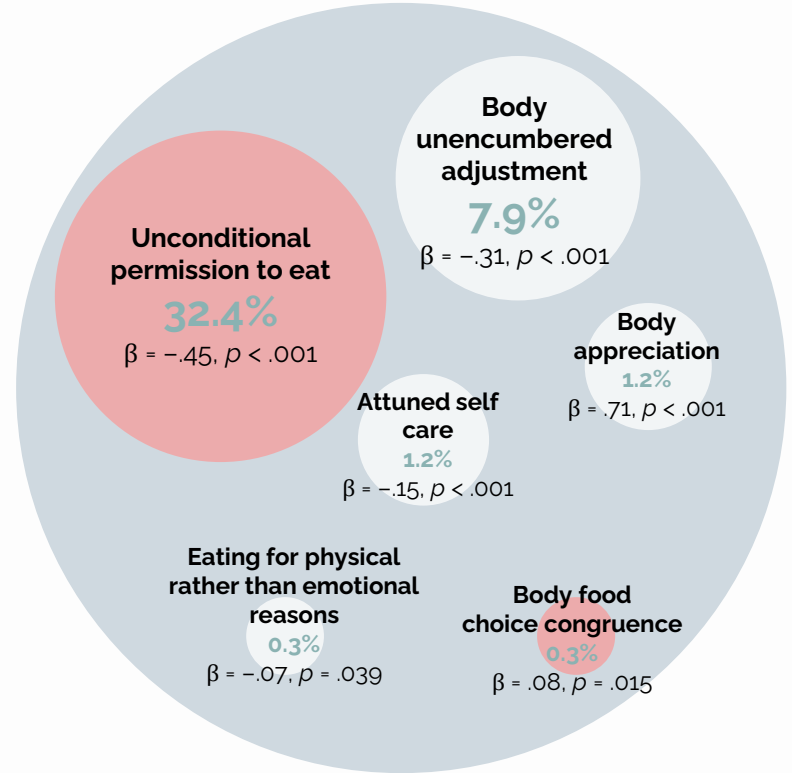
Healthy orthorexia and orthorexia nervosa: $r = .46, p < .001$

Healthy Orthorexia
(46.3% accounted for)



$F(4, 833) = 180.66, p < .001$

Orthorexia Nervosa
(43.3% accounted for)



$F(6, 833) = 105.40, p < .001$

Discussion

- **Conceptualization and classification of orthorexia nervosa**
- Support for healthy orthorexia and orthorexia nervosa as **two distinct eating styles** (e.g., Depa et al., 2019)
 - Healthy orthorexia is positively associated with positive body image, where as orthorexia nervosa is inversely associated with positive body image
 - Both orthorexia nervosa and healthy orthorexia are predicted by unconditional permission to eat – both are associated with “food rules”



Discussion

- Body food choice congruence is the largest predictor of healthy orthorexia, and the smallest in orthorexia nervosa – healthy orthorexia represents being in tune with the body and making food choices that honor health
- Orthorexia nervosa is predicted by body unencumbered adjustment – feelings of discomfort with the body when engaging with the world
- Individuals with high healthy orthorexia and low orthorexia nervosa vs those with low healthy orthorexia and high orthorexia nervosa?
- Enhancement of positive body image in treatment of orthorexia nervosa?



Thanks!

Questions?

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