Investigating attentional biases towards food and body cues in a non-clinical population

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1 Introduction

- Over attending to food and bodies contributes to eating disorder development and maintenance.
- Non-clinical populations show similar attentional biases; but does healthiness matter?
- RSVP task: adapted to investigate how food and body stimuli capture attention.
  - High reliability in clinical and non-clinical samples.
  - Used to address limitations of stroop and dot-probe.

Is attention captured more by food or bodies and does healthiness matter? Will eating disorder symptomology predict attentional biases?

2 Method

68 participants
- 68 participants recruited from Cloud Research (online study)
- EAT-26, BSQ-M, IPAQ and MPAM-R

92 distractor trials, 48 baseline trials (no distractor)

3 Results

- Greater impairment when distractor presented at lag 2 compared to lag 8 ($\eta^2_p = .41$)
- Great impairment following body than food images ($\eta^2_p = .16$)
- No difference between healthy and unhealthy distractors ($\eta^2_p = .01$)
- Lag x healthiness interaction ($\eta^2_p = .10$): greater recovery from lag 2 to lag 8 for unhealthy ($\eta^2 = .81$) compared to healthy ($d = .54$) stimuli
- Lag x distractor interaction ($\eta^2_p = .08$): greater recovery from lag 2 to lag 8 for body ($d = .73$) compared to food ($d = .54$) stimuli
- EAT-26, BSQ-M, IPAQ and MPAM-R (appearance & fitness subscales) scores did not predict attentional bias towards food ($F(6, 61) = 1.99, p = .08$) or body ($F(6, 61) = .33, p = .92$)

4 Discussion

- Impaired performance at lag 2 compared to lag 8 confirms RSVP task effective.
  - Bodies and food are appropriate distractors
  - Bodies are more distracting than food
  - Media’s overemphasis on importance of body shape -> bodies induce feelings of unease.
  - No significant difference between healthy and unhealthy bodies: were stimuli too extreme?
  - No significant difference between healthy and unhealthy food
  - Suggests attentional bias toward food may not be unique to high calorie food
  - Body dissatisfaction and eating and exercise habits did not effect attentional biases

Future research:
- Include extra lags (e.g. lag 4 & 6) to investigate how food and body stimuli hold attention over time
- Replicate with eating disorder and/or adolescent sample.

References


Pre-registration: https://osf.io/qj6am/