Guilty pleasures: The effect of perceived overeating on food addiction attributions and snack choice

Helen K. Ruddock*, Charlotte A. Hardman

Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Liverpool, L69 7ZA, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 March 2017
Received in revised form 21 October 2017
Accepted 23 October 2017
Available online 28 October 2017

Keywords:
Attribution theory
Food addiction
Guilt
Dietary concern
Beliefs

ABSTRACT

Despite being widely debated throughout the scientific community, the concept of food addiction remains a popular explanation for overeating and obesity amongst the lay public. Overeating is often accompanied by feelings of guilt and dietary concern, and this may lead people to attribute their eating to an addiction in order to minimise personal responsibility. Research also indicates that food addiction attributions and dietary concern may lead people to limit their exposure to tempting foods. To test these ideas, we examined the effect of perceived overeating on food addiction attributions and snack choice. Subjective ratings of guilt and dietary concern were indirectly manipulated by leading female participants (N=90) to believe they had eaten more than (overeating condition), less than (undereating condition), or roughly the same (control condition) amount of palatable foods in relation to their own estimated consumption and to previous participants. Participants then rated the relative importance of a list of explanations for their eating (including “the foods were really addictive”) and selected a snack to take home with them. Ratings of guilt and dietary concern were highest in the overeating condition, and lowest in the undereating condition, indicating that the manipulation had been successful. However, findings revealed no effect of condition on food addiction attributions. As predicted, participants in the overeating condition selected less tempting snacks than in the undereating condition. However, this effect was not mediated by guilt/dietary concern. There was also no association between food-addiction attributions and snack choice. These findings suggest that perceived overeating affects snack choice but not food addiction attributions. Future research should investigate whether food addiction attributions may be driven by feelings of guilt and dietary concern following longer-term disinhibited eating patterns.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Worldwide rates of obesity have more than doubled in the past three decades, with approximately 1.9 billion people classified as overweight (BMI > 25 kg/m²), and 600 million classified as obese (BMI > 30 kg/m²) (World Health Organization, 2016). This so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ has been attributed to a range of environmental, behavioural, and biological factors, and one theory holds that an ‘addiction’ to high-calorie foods may underlie some cases of obesity (e.g. Kenny, 2013). The concept of food addiction is widely debated throughout the scientific community, and several researchers have contested the view that food can be addictive in the same way as drugs of abuse (Carter et al., 2016; Hebebrand et al., 2014; Ziauddeen, Farooqi, & Fletcher, 2012). Despite this, the theory appears to receive much support from the lay public (Ruddock & Hardman, 2017). Recent surveys show that 86 per cent of community samples believe that certain foods are addictive, and 72 per cent hold the view that food addiction is to blame for the increased prevalence of obesity (Lee et al., 2013). Support for the food addiction concept appears to be particularly popular amongst those with increased weight status (Lee et al., 2013); for example, individuals with increased BMI were more likely to believe that they are addicted to food (Ruddock, Dickson, Field, & Hardman, 2015). In addition, research suggests that the term ‘food addiction’ is commonly used by members of the lay public to refer to a range of eating behaviours such as reward-driven eating, a preoccupation with food, and regular cravings (Ruddock et al., 2015).

Given the lack of scientific support for the concept, one possibility is that people may use food addiction to provide a more personally and socially acceptable attribution for overeating (Rogers & Smit, 2000). Specifically, it is thought that, by attributing eating to the ‘addictive’ effects of the food or to a biological
control beliefs may have detrimental effects on healthy eating to predictions derived from self-efficacy theory, such low self-control beliefs, consistent with previous findings (Ruddock, Christiansen et al., 2016), we hypothesised that individuals in the overeating condition would select less tempting snacks to take home with them, compared to those in control and undereating conditions, and that this would be mediated by higher levels of guilt and dietary concern (hypothesis 3).

Finally, we explored whether the selection of less tempting snacks would be associated with self-perceived food addiction and low self-control beliefs, consistent with previous findings (Nordgren et al., 2009; Ruddock, Christiansen et al., 2016) (hypothesis 4).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A power calculation was conducted using G*Power (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). This determined that a total sample size of 84 was required to detect a medium-sized main effect between three conditions ($\eta^2 = 0.05$, power = 0.8, $f = 0.35$) in a between-subjects design. Medium-sized effects have been reported in previous similar research (Adriaanse et al., 2014; Ruddock, Christiansen et al., 2016). We slightly over-recruited to account for participants guessing the aims of the study. Female staff and students ($N = 90$) from the University of Liverpool were invited to take part in a study which they were led to believe was about memory and food intake. Participants were randomly allocated to one of three conditions (i.e. overeating, undereating, or control), such that there were 30 participants in each condition. As this was a preliminary study into food addiction attributions, only females were recruited in order to minimise between-subject differences. Participants were excluded from the study if they were currently dieting, or had any food allergies or intolerances. Ethical approval was granted by the Institute of Psychology, Health and Society at the University of Liverpool.

2.2. Measures and materials

2.2.1. Ad libitum buffet lunch

The buffet lunch consisted of a variety of sweet and savoury high fat/sugar foods. In total, the lunch comprised 2608 calories and 117.5 g fat (see supplementary online materials for more details). Plates and bowls were covertly weighed before and after consumption to provide a measure of actual calorie intake.
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات