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## **Pleasure As an Ally of Healthy Eating? Contrasting Visceral and Epicurean Eating Pleasure and Their Association With Portion Size Preferences and Wellbeing**

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We develop and test a scale measuring Epicurean eating pleasure tendencies and show that, unlike traditional conceptualizations of eating pleasure, they are associated with eating moderation and higher well-being. We argue that ‘moralizing’ about food pleasure should give way to a more holistic, positive role for pleasure.

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# Pleasure as an Ally of Healthy Eating? Contrasting Visceral and Epicurean Eating Pleasure and their Association with Portion Size Preferences and Wellbeing

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on food and eating has overwhelmingly associated pleasure with impulsive visceral drives (Dube and Le Bel 2003). Visceral eating occurs because external cues, such as the mere sight, smell or taste of a pleasant food, activate the pleasure centers of the brain (Berridge 2009; Plassmann, O'Doherty, and Rangel 2010). Emotions can also trigger visceral eating urges, as people seek pleasurable foods as a way of regulating negative emotions (for a review, Macht 2008). This view highlights the negative characteristics of eating pleasure, leading to immoderation (van Strien et al. 1986) and food anxiety (Coveney 2000). It also echoes a long tradition in philosophy of considering gustatory pleasure as animal and uncontrolled (i.e., visceral), pursued by "brutes" (Korsmeyer 1999).

We contrast this view of pleasure with an "Epicurean" perspective, which recognizes that the sense of taste in particular, and the pleasure of eating in general, can be controlled by volition, educated and refined (Kass 1994). We define Epicurean eating pleasure as the pleasure derived from the multisensory, aesthetic and symbolic aspects of food. These facets of eating pleasure have received little attention in consumer behavior research, partly because of the difficulty of capturing them via traditional experimental paradigms (Alba and Williams 2013). Yet, recent studies have started to show how these Epicurean facets contribute to pleasure, for instance, by improving food presentation (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2012), providing rich multisensory information (Elder and Krishna 2010), giving meaning to food (Wansink, Payne, and North 2007), "ritualizing" the experience of eating (Vohs et al. 2013), or simply, paying more attention to senses while eating (Quoidbach and Dunn 2013).

In the current research, we aim to develop and test a scale measuring Epicurean eating pleasure tendencies, show how it differs from visceral eating pleasure tendencies (measured with External eating and Emotion eating tendencies), and more importantly, that Epicurean pleasure can be associated with moderation (e.g. preference for smaller portions) and a sense of higher well-being. Indeed, psychological wellbeing depends on our ability to "savor" pleasurable experiences, rather than accumulating pleasurable experiences (Quoidbach et al. 2010). In line with this argument, cross-cultural studies point at the fact that portion sizes and obesity rates are both lower in cultures with a strong focus on aesthetic and experiential food pleasures, like France and Japan (e.g. Rozin 2005).

First, we developed two new instruments: one designed to assess Epicurean eating pleasure tendencies, and the other to assess Preferences for larger food portions. The 29 original Epicurean items reflected the multisensory, aesthetic and symbolic facets of eating pleasure (e.g. "I value the look, the smell, the taste, the texture in mouth of foods", "There is a lot of beauty in food"), and the 25 original Portion size items measured preferences for larger food portions (e.g. "One regular serving of food never seems to be enough to satisfy me"). We presented the pool of items to seven judges to assess face validity and then examined the item reliability in a pre-study involving 265 adult Americans on an online marketplace (Amazon Mechanical Turk). We analyzed the results using exploratory factor analyses and finally obtained a seven-item Epicurean tendencies scale and a 6-item Preference for larger portions scale.

For the main study, we recruited 250 adult Americans on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We started the study with the two new scales

measuring Epicurean eating and Preferences for larger portions. We then administered the complete Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ, van Strien et al. 1986), which contains the 10-item External Eating scale (measuring visceral responsiveness to external food cues), the 13-item Emotional Eating scale (measuring visceral eating in response to negative emotions), and the 10-item Restrained Eating scale (measuring dieting tendencies). We also measured health worries with a 3-item scale developed by Rozin et al. (1999), and psychological wellbeing with the 8-item short version of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills and Argyle 2002). Finally, we asked the participants to indicate their age, gender, income, highest diploma, and weight and height (to compute their body mass index).

The Epicurean Eating scale and the Preference for larger portions scale had satisfactory Cronbach's alphas (respectively .86 and .75). Confirmatory factor analysis with the Epicurean Eating scale, the External Eating Scale, and the Emotional Eating scale showed that Epicurean eating tendencies were clearly distinct from visceral eating tendencies. Gender was the only demographic variable significantly associated with Epicurean eating tendencies scale, with women scoring higher than men ( $p < .04$ ). Epicurean eating tendencies were equally distributed across age, income, education, and BMI levels. In contrast, external and emotional eating increased with BMI and were strongly influenced by income.

We then estimated a structural equation model with seven latent variables using AMOS 19.0 (Arbuckle 2010) in order to compare the associations between the different scales. As expected, Preferences for larger portions were negatively correlated with Epicurean eating tendencies ( $c = -.14$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and positively correlated with external eating and emotional eating (resp.  $c = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $c = .15$ ,  $p = .02$ ). The expected contrast between Epicurean and visceral eating tendencies was also found when looking at wellbeing, which was positively correlated with Epicurean eating tendencies ( $c = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but negatively correlated with both external and emotional eating (resp.  $c = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $c = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Importantly, Epicurean eating tendencies were clearly distinct from dieting tendencies ( $c = .06$ ,  $p = .31$ ), which were associated with lower well-being ( $c = -.14$ ,  $p = .02$ ).

In conclusion, our research underlines the pitfalls of the moralization of food pleasure in research, which has tended to perceive eating pleasure as a "vice", a "sin of gluttony" that needs to be tamed (Askegaard et al. 2014). We believe that this dominant visceral perspective on eating pleasure, which highlights its uncontrolled and negative characteristics, should be complemented by an Epicurean perspective. The Epicurean perspective invites us to challenge the morality of food pleasure, suggesting that pleasure may in fact facilitate moderation and well-being, and calls for research to give a more holistic and positive role to taking pleasure in food (Block et al. 2011).

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