

# Introduction

Obesity and overweight are on the increase, eating disorders are becoming more common, and many people diet to lose weight. In parallel, diet-related subjects are in vogue and over the past few years there has been an explosion of interest in any aspect of diet, from healthy eating through to eating disorders. The popular press offers features on diet, bookstores sell books on healthy eating, and television producers broadcast documentaries on people who are overweight, are underweight, have a solution to weight, or need a solution to their weight. The academic and research literature has also proliferated. Diet provides the focus for dieticians, nutritionists, endocrinologists, geneticists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and a range of psychologists from social, biological, health, and clinical psychology perspectives. There are journals dedicated to the subject of diet, specialist books produced, and conferences held to provide a forum for discussion. This book aims to provide a detailed map of this expanding area.

This chapter covers the following:

- The aim of this book
- The focus of this book
- The structure of this book
- Further reading

## The Aim of This Book

The literature on diet is vast and is contributed to by individuals with a range of different interests. Some are interested in healthy eating, others are concerned with eating-related problems, and most produce work which is focused on their one area. Work is specialized to enable detailed

research and theoretical development. As a result the relationships between different aspects of diet-related work become unclear. For example, healthy eating provides a context for understanding obesity, but these two literatures are often kept separate. Food choice offers a context for understanding eating disorders, but the paths of these areas rarely cross. Dieting and body dissatisfaction are relevant to understanding eating disorders, obesity, and food choice but are only sometimes studied by the same people and written about in the same papers and same books.

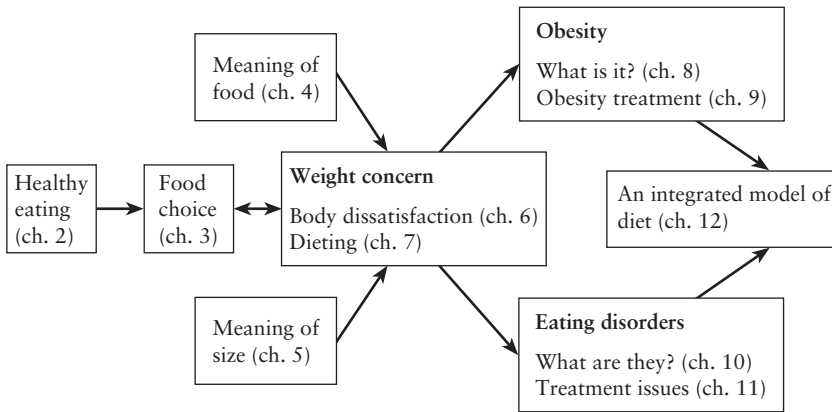
This book aims to provide a detailed map of the diet literature and to cover the spectrum of eating behavior, from healthy eating through body dissatisfaction and dieting to obesity and eating disorders. In doing so, it aims to show how these different areas are related to each other and to draw out some common themes which run through this immense body of work.

### **The Focus of This Book**

Diet is studied from a range of different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, and a comprehensive understanding of diet cannot be achieved without these different literatures. This book therefore includes literature from a range of approaches such as nutrition, physiology, psychiatry, and sociology. But the primary focus of the book is psychology. In particular, this book draws on mainstream psychology in the form of developmental, cognitive, clinical, social, and health psychology. It integrates this approach with that from the psychotherapeutic literature which is often based on clinical experience and informed by feminist or psychoanalytic perspectives. This book therefore offers “the psychology of eating” in the broadest sense and illustrates how a wealth of perspectives have been used to analyze this complex area of work.

### **The Structure of This Book**

The structure of the book is illustrated in figure 1.1. Chapter 2 focuses on healthy eating and describes what is currently considered to be a healthy diet, how diet influences health as a cause of both morbidity and mortality, and how diet is used as a treatment once a diagnosis has been made. It then explores who has a healthy diet and describes large-scale surveys



**Figure 1.1** From healthy to disordered eating: A spectrum of diet.

which have assessed children's diets, the diets of young adults, and the diets of the elderly. This chapter draws on both the medical and nutrition literatures.

Next, chapter 3 explores the research on food choice. This chapter focuses on three main theoretical approaches from psychology, and assesses the contribution of developmental theories, with their emphasis on exposure, social learning, and associative learning, and cognitive theories, with their focus on social cognition models. It also describes psychophysiological approaches in terms of the role of metabolism, the role of the hypothalamus, the impact of neurochemicals on hunger and satiety, and the role of stress in determining either under- or overeating. It is argued that, although useful as a means to explain healthy eating, these approaches to food choice only implicitly include the complex meanings associated with both food and body size.

In line with this, chapters 4 and 5 address the meanings of food and the meanings of size, respectively. Chapter 4 draws on the sociological and anthropological literatures which have examined the meaning of food and integrates these with writings of psychotherapists. Chapter 5 examines the meaning of size in terms of the impact of the media and the associations with thinness and obesity, and examines both the social psychology and feminist approaches. As a result of these meanings, food choice is complex, and many individuals develop weight concerns.

One form of weight concern is body dissatisfaction; chapter 6 examines what body dissatisfaction is, how it is measured, and what causes it. Body

dissatisfaction often leads to dieting, which is the focus of chapter 7. This chapter describes why body dissatisfaction leads to dieting. It explores the consequences of attempted food restriction and specifically examines the relationship between dieting and overeating and the role of boundaries, mood, cognitions, self-awareness, and denial. These two chapters on weight concern mainly focus on psychological research, with an emphasis on experimental and cross-sectional work. Weight concern illustrates the point at which healthy eating starts to become problematic. It is a common phenomenon and one which has unpleasant consequences for the majority of those who show both body dissatisfaction and dieting.

Obesity is another eating-related problem, and this is addressed in the next two chapters. Chapter 8 describes the prevalence, consequences, and causes of obesity, and argues that, although diet plays an important part in its etiology, eating behavior needs to be placed within a multidimensional causal model. Chapter 9 addresses the treatment of obesity and explores the effectiveness of dietary treatments, addresses the question of whether obesity should be treated at all, and explores alternative treatments including exercise, drugs, and surgery.

Anorexia and bulimia nervosa are also diet-related problems, and these form the focus of chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 10 explores the prevalence and causes of these eating disorders; chapter 11 examines the treatment approaches which have been developed and tested. The chapters on obesity and eating disorders describe the psychological, epidemiological, nutritional, and psychiatric perspectives on these problems. Throughout the book many themes recur across disparate aspects of diet and from different literatures.

The final chapter (chapter 12) first provides a summary of the book. It then highlights these common themes and offers an integrated model of diet.

### *The second edition*

It is now 5 years since I wrote the first edition of this book. During this time the literature on eating behavior, obesity, and eating disorders has proliferated, and concerns of unhealthy diets and eating problems are in the public eye more than they have ever been. This second edition aims to cover some of the newest research and address the latest thinking about the psychology of eating in the broadest sense. Each chapter has been updated

with recent data derived from recent debates, reviews, and research studies. I am aware that this book can never be an exhaustive overview of all the literature relevant to eating behavior. But I hope that this second edition will satisfy most researchers' need for information or, if not, will at least be able to provide them with a map and enable them to know where to find out more.

## Further Reading

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on diet from healthy to disordered eating. Below is a guide to journals, books, and websites for further reading on the subject.

### *Journals*

There are many journals which publish work in the area of diet. The following are some of the major specialist journals:

*International Journal of Eating Disorders*

*International Journal of Obesity*

*Appetite*

*European Eating Disorders Review*

*Obesity Research*

*European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

*Journal of the American College of Nutrition*

*British Journal of Nutrition*

*Nutrition Review*

These journals can be accessed online through databases such as Pubmed, Medline, and Psycinfo.

### *Books*

There are numerous popular and academic books on aspects of diet. The following are some key books which are useful sources of information.

*Healthy eating*

Truswell, A.S. 1999: *ABC of Nutrition*, 3rd ed. London: BMJ Books.

*Food choice*

- Capaldi, E. (ed.) 1996: *Why We Eat What We Eat: The Psychology of Eating*. Washington, DC: APA Press.
- Connor, M. and Armitage, C. 2002: *The Social Psychology of Food*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Gilbert, S. 1986: *Pathology of Eating*. London: Routledge.
- Mela, D.J. and Rogers, P.J. 1997: *Food, Eating and Obesity: The Psychobiological Basis of Appetite and Weight Control*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Rappoport, L. 2003: *How We Eat*. London: Independent Publishing Group.
- Shepherd, R. (ed.) 1989: *Handbook of the Psychophysiology of Human Eating*. London: Wiley.

*Weight concern*

- Grogan, S. 2008: *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children*. London: Routledge.
- Ogden, J. 1992: *Fat Chance! The Myth of Dieting Explained*. London: Routledge.
- Polivy, J. and Herman, C.P. 1983: *Breaking the Diet Habit*. New York: Basic Books.
- Thompson, J.K. and Smolak, L. (eds.) 2009: *Body Image, Eating Disorders, and Obesity in Youth: Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment*, 2nd ed. New York: APA Press.

*Obesity*

- Allison, D.B. (ed.) 1995: *Handbook of Assessment Methods for Eating Behaviors and Weight Related Problems: Measures, Theory, and Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- British Nutrition Foundation Task Force. 1999: *Obesity: The Report of the British Nutrition Foundation Task Force*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Brownell, K.D. and Foreyt, J.P. (eds.) 1986: *Handbook of Eating Disorders: Physiology, Psychology and Treatment of Obesity, Anorexia and Bulimia*. New York: Basic Books.
- NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York. 1997: *Systematic Review of Interventions in the Treatment and Prevention of Obesity*. York, UK: Author.

*Eating disorders*

- Allison, D.B. (ed.) 1995: *Handbook of Assessment Methods for Eating Behaviors and Weight Related Problems: Measures, Theory, and Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Brownell, K.D. and Fairburn, C.G. (eds.) 2005: *Eating Disorders and Obesity*. New York: Guilford Press.

- Buckroyd, J. and Rother, S. (eds.) 2008: *Psychological Responses to Eating Disorders and Obesity: Recent and Innovative Work*. Oxford: WileyBlackwell.
- Duker, M. and Slade, R. 2007: *Anorexia and Bulimia: How to Help*, 2nd ed. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Fallon, P., Katzman, M.A. and Wooley, S.C. (eds.) 1994: *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gordon, R.A. 2000: *Eating Disorders: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stunkard, A.J. and Stellar, E. (eds.) 1984: *Eating and Its Disorders*. Research Publications, Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease, Vol. 62. New York: Raven Press.
- Szmukler, G., Dare C. and Treasure, J. (eds.) 1995: *Handbook of Eating Disorders: Theory, Treatment and Research*. London: Wiley.

### *Classic texts*

- Bruch, H. 1974: *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia and the Person Within*. New York: Basic Books.
- Keys, A., Brozek, J., Henscel, A., Mickelson, O. and Taylor, H.L. 1950: *The Biology of Human Starvation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Orbach, S. 1978: *Fat Is a Feminist Issue . . . How to Lose Weight Permanently – Without Dieting*. London: Arrow Books.
- Orbach, S. 1993: *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age*, 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber. (Original work published in 1986)

### *Websites*

[www.b-eat.co.uk/Home](http://www.b-eat.co.uk/Home)

This is the website for the Eating Disorders Association and provides information and contacts about eating disorders.

[www.aso.org.uk](http://www.aso.org.uk)

This is the website for the Association for the Study of Obesity which provides information about obesity, further reading, and events.