Chapter #6

ON HEALTH AND APPEARANCE-ORIENTED EATING REGULATION GOALS: A LOOK AT PERSONAL AND VICARIOUS GOALS

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ABSTRACT
The regulation of eating behaviours is among the most common health goals among the general population (e.g., Milyavskaya & Nadolny, 2016). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), goals are often pursued in the service of broader life-goals, or aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which can be categorized as extrinsic (such as aspirations for wealth, fame, and physical attractiveness) or intrinsic (such as aspirations for personal growth and community contribution). In accordance with SDT, it has been proposed that eating regulation goals can be pursued in order to reach a slender and physically attractive body or in order to have a more healthy and fit lifestyle (e.g., Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2012). The main purpose of this chapter is to present a brief summary of the literature on health vs. appearance-oriented eating regulation goals. More specifically, we present studies that have examined how these two types of eating regulation goals are differently related to eating behaviours, well-being, and interpersonal styles with others. We also review our recent research (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017) showing that the health vs. appearance orientation not only applies to personal goals, but also to the goals that individuals have for their romantic partners.

Keywords: eating regulation goals, personal and vicarious goals, self-determination theory, health and appearance-oriented goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eating regulation plays a central role in the lives of many individuals as can be readily observed in the mass media with the multitude of weight lost TV shows and plethora of magazines focused on healthy eating and dieting. In fact, the regulation of eating behaviours is among the most common health goals among the general population (Milyavskaya & Nadolny, 2016). As some research suggests (e.g., Tucker & Anders, 2001), eating better and healthier is not only a goal that people personally pursue but also a goal that many women have for their romantic partners. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1987), goals – including eating regulation goals – can be pursued in the service of intrinsic or extrinsic aspirations. Some people, then, attempt to regulate their eating behaviours in order to reach a slender and physically attractive body (extrinsic motivation) whereas other individuals are predominantly focused on becoming healthier (intrinsic motivation). In the present chapter, we first present the distinction between health and appearance-oriented eating regulation goals proposed by Verstuyf and colleagues (e.g., Verstuyf, Van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Boone, 2014; Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2012). Second, we present key research showing that these two ways of regulating eating behaviours are differently related to various outcomes

(e.g., eating patterns, psychological well-being). Third, we review our own research that focuses on eating regulation in the context of romantic relationships. More specifically, we present research showing that: (1) women's eating regulation goals are related to their interpersonal style toward their partners, and (2) the health vs. appearance distinction also applies to eating goals that women have for their partners. Finally, we propose some avenues that appear promising for future research.

2. BACKGROUND

According to SDT, individuals often pursue goals in order to reach broader life values or aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In line with SDT, aspirations can be broadly categorized into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. The focus behind intrinsic aspirations is to develop one's personal interests and potential (Duriez, 2011). Intrinsic aspirations are believed to be inherently rewarding because they directly satisfy the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). Personal growth, emotional intimacy, and community contribution are examples of intrinsic aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Extrinsic aspirations, in contrast, are not believed to directly satisfy individuals' basic psychological needs as they are directed toward external indicators of worth or external rewards. Extrinsic aspirations can be appealing for some individuals, who believe that they will lead to power, social approval or a sense of worth (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). Examples of extrinsic aspirations are physical appearance, popularity, fame, and wealth (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Research has clearly shown that having a higher focus on intrinsic aspirations compared to extrinsic aspirations lead to higher satisfaction, self-actualization, vitality, and well-being (e.g., Hope, Milyavskaya, Holding, & Koestner, 2014; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan, et al., 1999; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000), while focusing on extrinsic aspirations leads to worse relationships (Kasser & Ryan, 2001).

3. HEALTH VS. APPEARANCE-ORIENTED EATING REGULATION GOALS

As with most other goals or behaviours, individuals can choose to regulate their eating behaviours in the service of broader values or aspirations. In line with SDT, Verstuyf and colleagues (Verstuyf et al., 2014; Verstuyf et al., 2012) proposed the distinction between health-focused and appearance-focused eating regulation. In other words, people may choose to regulate their eating behaviours because they want to improve or maintain their health (health aspirations) or because they have the desire to have a thinner, more physically attractive appearance (extrinsic aspirations). Verstuyf and colleagues (2012) created a measure, based on the Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), to assess participants' goals for eating regulation. After reading the stem "I regulate my food intake because…", participants indicate how strongly they value each of the eating regulation goals using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*). Three items refer to health-focused eating regulation (e.g., "I want to be healthy") and three items refer to appearance-focused eating regulation (e.g., "others would find me more attractive"). The scale appears to have adequate psychometric properties (Verstuyf et al., 2012).

Verstuyf and colleagues (2012) examined body dissatisfaction as a motivating force driving one's effort to regulate one's eating behaviours using a sample of 244 female adolescents. Results of this research revealed that body dissatisfaction was strongly and

positively related to appearance-focused eating regulation but not significantly related with health-focused eating regulation. This indicates that adolescents who are dissatisfied with their body are more prone to regulate their eating behaviours to improve their physical appearance. Results of another study further reveal that appearance-focused eating regulation is positively related to a drive for thinness and to binge eating symptoms (Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soetens, & Soenens, 2016). In contrast, health-focused eating regulation was found to be positively related to healthy eating behaviours (e.g., eating vegetables) while being negatively related to binge eating symptoms. In a sample of adult female dieters, Putterman and Linden (2004) found that women who were motivated to change their appearance were more likely to use drastic dieting strategies (such as fasting) and to report losing control over eating than individuals dieting out of health concerns. Eating regulation based on appearance reasons has also been found to be associated with the frustration of the three basic psychological needs posited by SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness; Verstuyf et al., 2012). In contrast, health-oriented goals were found to be either unrelated or negatively related to diet-specific need frustration. These findings suggest that regulating one's eating behaviours in the service of extrinsic aspirations comes with feelings of pressure, incompetence, and social tensions (Verstuyf et al., 2012).

4. HEALTH AND APPEARANCE-ORIENTED EATING REGULATION GOALS IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Romantic partners are likely to influence one other in different spheres of life, including the eating domain. Romantic partners take part in various activities related to eating (e.g., shopping for ingredients, cooking together and sharing mealtimes) that give rise to numerous occasions to interact and influence each other's attitudes, values, and behaviours toward food and eating (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003). Thus, it appears important to examine eating regulation goals in the context of romantic relationships as the romantic partner can play a significant role in promoting or hindering the development (or maintenance) of optimal regulation of eating behaviours (e.g., Carbonneau, Carbonneau, Cantin, & Gagnon-Girouard, 2015; Ng, Ntoumanis, Thogersen-Ntoumani, Stott, & Hindle, 2013).

To examine how health and appearance-oriented eating regulation goals operate in the context of romantic relationships, we collected data from 131 couples (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2016; Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017). Heterosexual couples (mean age of 44.41 years, SD = 13.08 years) who were either married (63.2%), cohabiting (30.8%) or dating (6%) were recruited by a professional survey firm from the province of Quebec (Canada). Full details of the study procedures are outlined in Carbonneau and Milyavskaya (2017). In this data, we were interested in (1) whether the motivation underlying women's eating regulation goals differed as a function of their interpersonal style with their romantic partner (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2016); (2) how women's personal and vicarious eating regulation goals relate to their partner's perceptions of support, well-being, and relationship quality (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017).

Past research (e.g., Tucker & Anders, 2001) suggests that a number of married women would like their spouse to adopt better eating habits. Based on SDT (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1987), we posited that this desire can translate into women adopting an *autonomy-supportive* or a *controlling* interpersonal style with their spouse with regard to eating regulation. Autonomy-support refers to the active support of another person's capacity to be autonomous and self-initiating (e.g., Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & La Guardia,

2006). In the romantic sphere, supporting the spouse's autonomy refers to providing him/her with choices, acknowledging his/her perspectives, and encouraging him/her to express oneself authentically rather than pressuring him/her to be or behave in a specific way (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; La Guardia & Ryan, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2004). In contrast, a controlling interpersonal style is seen when one dismisses or invalidates the spouse's feelings and creates an environment in which love and acceptance are made contingent on the spouse's behaviours (Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003). Past research has clearly demonstrated that autonomy support is more beneficial than interpersonal control in terms of psychological functioning, relationship quality, and general well-being (e.g., Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006; Deci, et al., 2001; Demir, Özdemir & Marum, 2011; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997; Soenens et al., 2007; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, & Matos, 2005).

One purpose of our study was to investigate whether the motivation underlying the eating regulation goals of women who are perceived by their husband as autonomy-supportive is distinct from the motivation of those who are perceived as relatively more controlling. We hypothesized that autonomy-supportive women should report personally pursuing eating regulation goals for more health-oriented (intrinsic aspiration) and less appearance-oriented (extrinsic aspiration) reasons than controlling women. We also hypothesized that men who perceive their wife as autonomy-supportive (vs. controlling) with regard to eating regulation should report higher levels of psychological well-being and relationship quality.

These hypotheses were tested with the 81 married couples in the study. Two groups of participants were created based on whether the wife was perceived as having a relatively more autonomy-supportive (n = 46) or controlling (n = 35) interpersonal style toward their partner with regard to eating regulation. ANOVAs were conducted in order to examine the differences between the two groups (see Table 1 for all means and results). Results showed that autonomy-supportive women personally pursued more health-oriented eating regulation goals than controlling women, $F(1,80) = 5.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$. Meanwhile, autonomy-supportive women did not significantly differ from controlling women in terms of appearance-oriented eating goals, $F(1,80) = 0.01$, $p = .92$. In addition, the husbands of autonomy-supportive women reported higher psychological well-being $F(1,80) = 4.66$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$, as well as higher relationship quality, $F(1,80) = 12.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$, than the husbands of controlling women. Overall, these results show that women perceived as autonomy-supportive by their husband are more likely to personally pursue health-based eating regulation goals than women who are perceived as controlling. It is possible that such an intrinsic orientation for one's own behaviour facilitates the ability to take another person's feelings and perspectives into consideration, therefore preventing individuals from pressuring others into thinking or acting a certain way. The results of this study also replicate previous findings that individuals derive significant benefits from having an autonomy-supportive relational partner (Carbonneau et al., 2015; Deci et al., 2006).

Table 1.
Results of the ANOVAs.

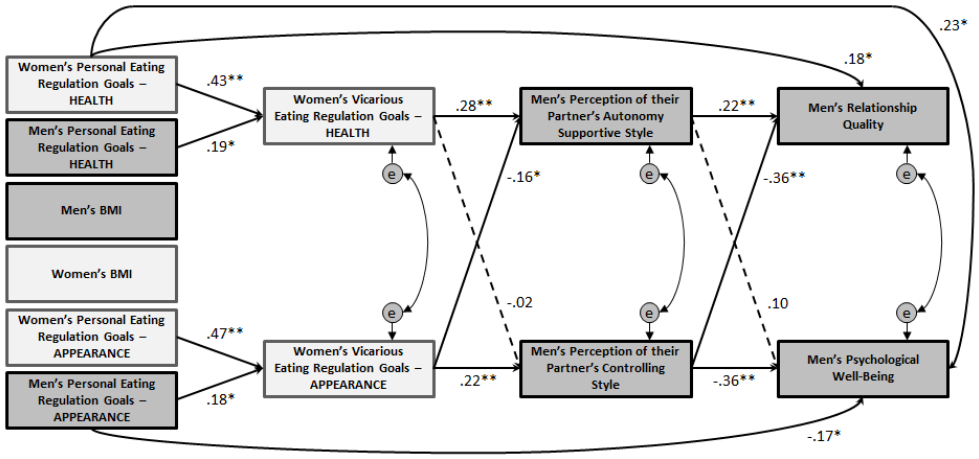
Dependent Variable	Autonomy-supportive M (SD)	Controlling M (SD)	
Health-oriented eating regulation	6.56 (0.57)	6.19 (0.93)	$F(1,80) = 5.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$.
Appearance-related eating regulation	4.86 (1.64)	4.82 (1.39)	$F(1,80) = 0.01$, $p = .92$.
Husbands' well-being	3.22 (0.59)	2.92 (0.64)	$F(1,80) = 4.66$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$.
Husbands' relationship quality	6.45 (0.59)	5.87 (0.87)	$F(1,80) = 12.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$.

In addition to pursuing personal goals, many people also have vicarious goals, that is, goals for their close others (Koestner, Powers, Carbonneau, Milyavskaya, & Chua, 2012, Study 3). Authors have traditionally focused on the vicarious goals parents have for their children. For instance, Mageau, Bureau, Ranger, Allen and Soenens (2016) have found that parents who have performance goals for their teenager are more controlling while parents with mastery goals for their teenager display more autonomy-supportive behaviours. Although vicarious goals are likely to be at play in hierarchical relationships (such as parent-child relationships), they can also manifest in more egalitarian relationships such as romantic partnerships (e.g., Koestner at al., 2012). Markey, Gomel and Markey (2008) have conducted research about eating regulation in the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. Their research suggests that women are more likely to attempt to regulate their partner's eating behaviours than the other way around. They however did not differentiate between the types of eating regulation goals each partner had for their spouse. In our study, we were interested in examining whether women who want their partner to regulate their eating behaviours for health reasons are more likely to regulate their own eating behaviours out of health concerns. In the same vein, we wanted to examine whether the appearance-based eating regulation goals that women have for their partner originate from their own extrinsically motivated eating regulation goals. Such health and appearance vicarious eating regulation goals that women have for their partner are likely to then relate to the interpersonal style (i.e., autonomy-supportive vs. controlling) adopted toward their partner and, ultimately, to the partner's well-being and relationship quality.

Our recent paper (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017) directly examined these questions. Based on previous literature, we posited that women who endorse health-oriented personal goals would also report having health-related vicarious goals for their partner and that women who endorse more appearance-oriented reasons for pursuing personal goals would also entertain appearance-oriented goals for their partner.

Furthermore, we hypothesized that women who have health-oriented vicarious goals for their partner would be perceived as more autonomy-supportive while women who have appearance-oriented vicarious goals for their partner would be perceived as more controlling. Finally, we hypothesized that men who perceive their partner as autonomy-supportive would report higher well-being and relationship quality while the contrary was expected for men who perceive their partner as controlling. Structural equation modelling analyses with the full sample of 131 couples were conducted to test these hypotheses (see Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017, for full details). As results showed (see Figure 1), the health-oriented eating goals that women have for their partner were found to be rooted in their own personal health-oriented eating goals. Similarly, women's appearance-oriented eating goals were found to reflect their own appearance-oriented eating goals. It was further found that women who have health-related eating regulation goals for their partner were perceived as more autonomy-supportive, which positively predicted the partner's relationship quality. Conversely, women who have appearance-related eating regulation goals for their partner were perceived as more controlling, which was negatively associated with the partner's well-being and relationship quality. Overall, the results of this study suggest that the type of goals that women pursue are not only related to more or less positive personal outcomes but also affect the relational and psychological well-being of their close others.

Figure 1.
Carbonneau and Milyavskaya's (2017) Structural Equation Model Results.



Source: Springer *Motivation and Emotion*, "Your goals or mine? Women's personal and vicarious eating regulation goals and their partners' perceptions of support, well-being, and relationship quality", 41, 2017, 465-477, Noémie Carbonneau & Marina Milyavskaya (© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2017). With permission of Springer.

Note. Results of the path analysis. Variables in *dark gray* were reported by men, variables in *light gray* were reported by women. For clarity concerns, covariances between exogenous variables do not appear in the figure. BMI = body mass index; $n = 131$ couples; $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

4. DISCUSSION

Many individuals attempt to regulate their eating behaviours but they are not all motivated by the same reasons. In this chapter, we have presented the distinction proposed by SDT (e.g., Verstuyf et al., 2014; Verstuyf et al., 2012) between eating goals that are pursued to accrue health benefits and those that are pursued in order to obtain or maintain a desirable physical appearance. Overall, research presented in this chapter shows that regulating one's eating behaviours out of concern for one's appearance is associated with less positive outcomes than focusing on health. For example, research has shown that appearance-motivated eating behaviour is related to body dissatisfaction, binge eating symptoms and unhealthy dieting strategies, which is not the case for health-focused goals for eating regulation (Putterman & Linden, 2004; Verstuyf et al., 2012). We have also presented our own research investigating how romantic partners attempt to regulate their own and one another's eating behaviours. Our research suggests that the type of eating goals that women pursue is related to how they behave with their romantic partner with regard to eating regulation (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2016). More specifically, women who are perceived as autonomy-supportive (vs. controlling) by their husband are more likely to report that they personally regulate their eating behaviours out of health concerns. Interestingly, there was no difference in appearance-oriented goals among autonomy-supportive compared to controlling women. Although preliminary, these results suggest that more effort should be invested in promoting women's pursuit of health goals than in preventing them from pursuing appearance goals. Nevertheless, these findings need to be replicated in other studies and with different populations before any definitive recommendation could be made.

Our research also shows that the type of goals (i.e., health or appearance oriented) that women have for their partner are consistent with the goals they personally pursue (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017). In addition, as results suggest, men experience greater benefits in terms of psychological and relational well-being when their partner's personal and vicarious eating regulation goals are health-based rather than appearance-based. Overall, results of our research shed some light on how vicarious goals are set in romantic relationships (i.e., by paralleling one's own personal goals) and how they affect interpersonal behaviours, well-being, and relationship quality.

Research by Mageau and colleagues (2016) has shown that the type of achievement goals (i.e., performance vs. mastery oriented) that mothers have for their teenager predicts their tendency to adopt autonomy-supportive and controlling behaviours. Results of our research (Carbonneau & Milyavskaya, 2017) are in line with Mageau and al.'s (2016) findings as they show that the type of eating goals that women pursue predict whether they are perceived by their partner as autonomy-supportive or controlling. More specifically, our results suggest that endorsing health-related reasons for regulating eating may facilitate women's ability to take their romantic partner's feelings and perspective into consideration. In contrast, regulating eating behaviours in the service of extrinsic ends (i.e., to obtain/maintain an attractive physical appearance) may lead one to pressure others into thinking or acting a certain way. Overall, this research improves our understanding of the determinants of autonomy support and control in relationships.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although other researchers have been interested in the distinction between health and appearance-oriented personal eating regulation for a few years, the study of vicarious eating regulation goals is new and still in the process of development. The focus of our research was on women's vicarious goals for their male partner, but men's vicarious goals for their partner should definitively be investigated in future research. Also, all couples in our study were heterosexual; replicating the present results with same-sex couples would be important. More research is also needed on how vicarious goals are set and pursued and how they impact on each partner's goal attainment. We believe that future research should also investigate the longitudinal impact of being successful vs. unsuccessful in the attainment of goals that romantic partners have for one another. For instance, would a wife's relationship satisfaction be affected if her husband failed to reach an important goal she has for him? More research is definitely needed in order to better understand the intricacies of vicarious goals in romantic relationships, and in other types of relationships as well.

6. CONCLUSION

The regulation of eating behaviours is among the most common goals that people pursue. However, how the goal pursuit process unfolds will likely depend on the type of eating regulation goals at play (i.e., health vs. appearance-based). Research presented in this chapter clearly shows that eating regulation is associated with more benefits (for oneself and also for close others) when the underlying motivation is to have a healthier lifestyle rather than trying to reach a more physically attractive body. Future research aimed at better understanding the mechanisms underlying personal and vicarious goals, especially in the realm of eating, appears promising.

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KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Vicarious goals: goals for others

Intrinsic goals: aspirations that are inherently rewarding (e.g., personal growth, emotional intimacy, community contribution)

Extrinsic goals: aspirations that are directed toward external indicators of worth or external rewards (e.g., physical appearance, popularity, fame, wealth)

Autonomy support: active support of another person's capacity to be autonomous and self-initiating

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