

Title: Exploring adolescent eating behaviours: the role of parents, peers, and self-perceptions

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Purpose: To examine parent and peer influences and self-perceptions on adolescent eating behaviours using an expectancy-value model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Methods: 438 girls and 419 boys between the ages of 15-18 years completed scientifically supported instruments to examine perceptions of healthy eating competence, values, behaviour, and significant other role-modeled behaviour and emotional support.

Results: First, multivariate analyses with follow-up ANOVA's were conducted to examine gender differences. Girls reported significantly greater healthy eating values, number of peers engaged in healthy eating, peer and parent role-modeled behaviour and emotional support, and more positive eating habits compared to boys. Correlation and invariance analyses revealed a number of gender differences in the relationships among study variables. Using SEM, measurement and structural models supported the EV model (Boys: RMSEA=.06, CFI=.97, IFI=.97, NNFI=.95, SRMR=.05; Girls: RMSEA=.07, CFI=.95, IFI=.95, NNFI=.94, SRMR=.05). In these models, parent and peer influences were significant predictors of perceptions of competence and values, the direct paths of competence and values to eating behaviour were significant, and the models accounted for 49% (girls) and 59% (boys) of the variance in healthy eating. Alternate models also demonstrated significant yet weaker direct influences of parents and peers, predicting 19% to 27% of the variance.

Conclusions: These findings highlight the importance of parent and peer influences, demonstrate the expectancy-value model as a strong predictive framework to examine healthy eating behaviour during adolescence, and support implications for research and practice. The predictive models will be compared to similar approaches exploring physical activity.