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| **Explanations for the success and failure of dieting** | | | |
| **Explanations for the success and failure of dieting AO1** | | | |
| **The spiral model**    Heatherton and Polivy (1992) proposed a model of dieting behaviour in terms of a chain of linked events. Food-restricted dieting often begins in adolescence when individuals) overwhelmingly women) experience body dissatisfaction. Low self-esteem may be a risk factor for dieting attempts because it makes the individual more likely to make negative comparisons. Initially, first time dieters experience some success because they temporarily lose weight. But lasting weight loss is rare, so ultimately weight is regained and the outcome is failure. At this point, some personal deficiency, for example they didn’t try hard enough or lacked willpower.  Far from radically rethinking their approach to weight loss, dieters ‘stick to the plan’, only next time they push themselves to make a bigger effort by eating even less. This ever-greater restriction of food intake has physical and psychological effects. The dieter experiences more frustration and emotional distress, which makes them vulnerable to disinhibited eating. At the same time, metabolic processes in the body change so that weight loss becomes physically more difficult to achieve. For instance, ghrelin levels increase and leptin level decrease after significant weight loss. The result is further failure followed by repeated attempts to ‘diet harder’, and a lowering of self-esteem and increase in depression over time. The individual is now trapped in a destructive ‘downward spiral’ in which weight loss is less and less likely. | | | |
| **Ironic processes theory**  When people deliberately restrict their food intake and consider themselves as being ‘on a diet’, they become more preoccupied with thoughts of food rather than less.(LT 9) An expalanation for this was provided by Wegner (1994) in his *theory of ironic processes*. It stems from his observation in an experiment that asking people not to think about a white bear almost guaranteed they would think about one, even more often than people specifically asked to think of one. So the paradoxical outcome of trying to suppress a thought is to make it more likely. When dieters label certain foods as ‘forbidden’, these become more salient (i.e. they stand out). They are more likely to think about these foods precisely because they are trying not to. For example, someone who tells themselves not to think about chocolate finds that images of chocolate bars are easier to retrieve from memory. This leads to disinhibition of eating, a loss of control, excessive food intake and ultimately dieting failure.  There is a further irony to this unfortunate situation. Attempting to distract yourself from thinking about forbidden foods (for example by reading a book) requires mental activity. This leaves you lacking the cognitive processing capacity to suppress the thought, which inevitably reappears. This is why ‘being on a diet’ can be at the same time so all-consuming and yet self-defeating. To be successful at preventing paradoxical thoughts about food that might lead them into disinhibition, the dieter has to spend all their time, energy and undivided attention trying not to think about their food. | | | |
| **Restraint, disinhibition and the boundary model**  These concepts can be related specifically to dieting success and failure.  **Restrained eating:** The essence of most diets is to place limits on how much food is eaten. However, because dieters are making conscious efforts to retrain their eating, their behaviour is under cognitive control. They now think a great deal more about food-related matters, in ways that are susceptible to cognitive biases and distortions.  **Disinhibition:** Retrained eaters are vulnerable to internal and external food-related cues. These tempt the dieter to break their diets. If they do, their eating may become disinhibited and they could consume a very large amount of calories very quickly. Over time, they lose no more wright than someone who was not dieting, and may even gain some.  **Boundary model:** Dieters do not regulate their eating in response to feelings of hunger or satiety, instead, they set themselves a limit on how much and what type of food they think they should eat. If they eat past this point they will continue to eat until they are full on the basis of ‘what the hell, I might as well’ | | | |
| **Explanations for the success and failure of dieting AO3** | | | |
| **Uses of the spiral model**  **P:** A strength of thespiral model as an explanation for the success and failure of dieting is that the model proposes several ways in which dieting can become successful, involving ‘breaking out’ of the spiral at various points.  **E:** For example, Heatherton and Polivy point out that the key issue is to prevent lowering of self-esteem and avoid putting on weight rather than to lose it are less likely to experience disinhibited eating, perhaps because their self-esteem is higher.  **E:** This is a strength because it is shows that the spiral theory has been influential in explaining the success of dieting.  **L:** As a result, the explanatory power of the spiral model is increased. | **Support for ironic processes theory**  **P:** A strength for ironic processes theory as an explanation for the success and failure of dieting is that it has supportive research.  **E:** For example, Adriaanse et al (2011) investigated snacking behaviour. Their participants were female students who were trying to cut down on their intake of unhealthy snacks such as chocolate or crisps. They were presented with diet intentions expressed in a negative form (e.g. ‘When I am sad, I will not eat chocolate’). The researchers found an ironic rebound effect. Just being exposed to this statement reinforced the association between ‘being sad’ and ‘eating chocolate’, making the link between the two more accessible in memory and more likely to be recalled. It was found that the participants also ate more unhealthy snacks and consumed more calories than the control group.  **E:** This study therefore confirms how difficult it is to suppress thoughts of eating once they become accessible in memory.  **L:** As a result, the validity of the ironic processes theory as an explanation of dieting failure is increased. | **Individual differences**  **P:** One weakness for the explanations for the success and failure of dieting is that they ignore individual differences.  **E:** For example, Ogden (2010) challenged these theories that suggest dieting is counterproductive so explain why some people succeed in losing weight even when they are preoccupied with food. Such people are in the minority, but they include anorexics who lose weight through extremely restricted eating.  **E:** An explanation for this could be ‘locus of control’. ‘Internals’ believe that weight loss is contingent on their own efforts and that they have control over success or failure. (Katie Hopkins)  **L:** This therefore reduces the credibility of the explanations for the success and failure of dieting. | **MAID** |