

Daily Fluctuations in Food Craving, Mood, and Body Dissatisfaction

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Need for eating food irregularly across the day or food craving depends on several variables [1]. When individual differences are examined, food craving is typically associated with negative mood, body image, body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem, in both clinical and non-clinical samples [2]. Less is known however on how mood, body dissatisfaction, and food craving covariate daily, when within-person fluctuations are inspected.

Aim of the present study was to explore how variation in food craving across the day is associated with fluctuations in positive mood, negative mood, and body dissatisfaction, in a non-clinical sample of adults. The participants ($N = 24$, 12 males, 6 of them on a diet, 12 females, 5 of them on a diet) reported 3 times per day (11 am, 4 pm, 9 pm), for 7 days, on their present positive (7 adjectives) and negative mood (13 adjectives, selected from “Profile of Mood States”- POMS, and “Positive and Negative Affect Schedule”- PANAS), body dissatisfaction (9 items, selected from EDI-2 and EDAM, for both males and female), and food craving (7 items, selected from FCQ-T [3]). Data were analyzed via multi-level modeling; repeated measures were centered within-person, that is, they were centered on individual means.

Results showed a covariation between food craving and body dissatisfaction, with higher levels of food craving being reported when participants referred higher dissatisfaction with their body shape (fixed effects: intercept = 1.87, $p < 0.001$; slope = 0.35, $p < 0.001$), and vice versa, with poorer control over food craving favoring momentary increases in body dissatisfaction (fixed effects: intercept = 2.28, $p < 0.001$; slope = 0.17, $p < 0.001$). Fluctuations in food craving were also negatively associated with positive mood, but in participants on a diet only, with a significant second-level interaction effect between Positive Mood and Being on a diet ($p < 0.05$). No association emerged when fluctuations in negative mood and food craving were inspected.

The present study shows that food craving and body dissatisfaction covary also when momentary fluctuations are observed [2]. Contrary to results observed in between-people studies, the present within-person study suggests that food craving and negative mood are not associated [1]. Rather, control over food craving increases positive mood, and vice versa, thus suggesting that positive mood might effectively work as a protective factor over food craving in people on a diet. A larger sample is needed to confirm the present findings.

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