13.1 Explanations for the Success and Failure of Dieting

Total Marks

AQA 7182 · about 45 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Outline one way that low calorie sweeteners might paradoxically undermine dieting success, and give a brief reason why this effect might occur.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 A researcher plans an experiment to test whether a brief thought suppression instruction increases later snack intake in restrained dieters. State an operationalised independent variable and dependent variable suitable for this laboratory study.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Outline the boundary model that complements restraint theory in explaining why a small perceived lapse may trigger a large overeating episode in a dieting context.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Explain Wegner's ironic processes theory as an explanation for why actively trying not to think about tempting foods can undermine dieting in everyday contexts.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Identify two common triggers of disinhibition in restrained dieters and briefly explain how each trigger undermines restraint, using examples such as alcohol or stress.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Explain two cognitive factors, other than restraint and ironic processes, that help explain why some dieters succeed while others fail. For each factor, give a short explanation of how it helps success or causes failure.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

7 Discuss psychological explanations for the success and failure of dieting. In your answer include reference to restraint theory and the boundary model, ironic processes theory, and at least two pieces of supporting or challenging research evidence. Evaluate these explanations and reach a reasoned conclusion about their usefulness for understanding why dieting sometimes works and sometimes fails.

(Total for Question 7 is 16 marks)

Mark scheme · 13.1 Explanations for the Success and Failure of Dieting

Question 1

states a plausible effect, e.g. sweeteners can maintain sweet preference or lead to increased overall calorie intake later oe	**M1**
gives a reason, e.g. dissociation between sweetness and calories may disrupt appetite regulation or promote compensatory eating oe	**A1**

Answer: Low calorie sweeteners may maintain a preference for sweet tastes or lead to compensatory eating later; because sweetness without calories can disrupt learned cues about energy intake, people may consume more elsewhere.

Question 2

IV operationalised: instruction condition, e.g. 'thought suppression' group told to push thoughts of chocolate out of mind versus 'control' group given no suppression instruction oe	**M1**
states whether IV is independent groups or repeated measures if required, e.g. independent groups design with random allocation oe	**M1**
DV operationalised: objective measure of snack intake in grams or number of calories consumed in a 10 minute taste test oe	**M1**
includes a clear measurement detail, e.g. weigh snacks before and after or record number of chocolate pieces eaten, giving a numeric DV oe	**A1**

Answer: IV: instruction condition, independent groups, e.g. 'suppression' group told to avoid thinking about chocolate versus 'control' group given no such instruction. DV: amount of snack eaten during a 10 minute taste test, measured in grams or total calories, recorded by weighing snack bowls before and after.

Question 3

states that the boundary model distinguishes a cognitive boundary between allowed intake and prohibited intake oe	**M1**
states that when intake crosses the boundary, dieters experience disinhibition and may eat considerably more than before oe	**M1**
explains why a small perceived lapse, such as a single biscuit, can lead to a larger binge because the boundary has been perceived as broken oe	**A1**

Answer: The boundary model says dieters maintain a cognitive boundary between permitted and forbidden intake; once the perceived boundary is crossed, psychological disinhibition can occur and lead to a larger overeating episode.

Question 4

states the core of Wegner's theory: intentional suppression uses a monitoring process that ironically increases the accessibility of the thought oe	**M1**
applies this to food: trying not to think of tasty foods can make the thought more salient, increasing craving and the chance of lapse oe	**A1**

Answer: Wegner's ironic processes theory proposes that active thought suppression uses a monitoring process that makes the suppressed thought more accessible, so trying not to think about tempting foods can make them more salient and increase cravings and lapses.

Question 5

identifies alcohol as a trigger and explains it reduces self control and lowers perceived consequences oe	**M1**
identifies stress as a trigger and explains it shifts behaviour toward comfort eating and reduces cognitive resources for restraint oe	**M1**
each explanation links the trigger to a mechanism that undermines restraint, e.g. reduced inhibition or cognitive load leading to lapse oe	**A1**

Answer: Alcohol can undermine restraint by reducing inhibition and perceived costs of breaking the diet, leading to disinhibited eating. Stress uses up cognitive resources and increases emotional eating, so a stressed dieter is more likely to lapse.

Question 6

identifies first cognitive factor, e.g. habits and food cue reactivity, and explains how it affects dieting success or failure oe	**M1**
develops the first point with mechanism, e.g. strong habits and high cue reactivity make restraint harder and predict lapses, whereas new adaptive habits support success oe	**A1**
identifies second cognitive factor, e.g. executive function and working memory capacity, and explains its relevance oe	**M1**
develops the second point, e.g. better executive control supports sustained restraint and planning, while low cognitive control makes suppression and self regulation more likely to fail oe	**A1**
provides an applied example or brief evidence to illustrate one of the factors oe	**M1**
links back to dieting outcomes, explaining why these cognitive factors create individual differences in success or failure oe	**A1**

Answer: One factor is habitual responding and cue reactivity: strong learned habits and high sensitivity to food cues make it easy to lapse when cues appear, so changing the environment or forming new habits supports success. A second factor is executive function, including working memory and inhibitory control: dieters with stronger self control and planning abilities can sustain restraint and resist tempting cues, whereas those with poorer cognitive control are more likely to succumb to impulses.

Question 7

Level 4 Knowledge of psychological explanations is accurate and detailed. Discussion is thorough and evaluative, integrating evidence and alternative explanations. Evaluation considers methodology, real world application and ethical issues, and the answer reaches a clear, supported conclusion on the usefulness of the explanations for understanding dieting outcomes. The response applies specialist terminology appropriately and is coherent.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is clear with some detail. Discussion includes evaluation and supporting evidence, though some points may be less developed. Alternative explanations are considered and a conclusion is offered but may lack depth. The answer is mostly organised and uses specialist terms correctly.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited. Discussion includes some evaluation but is superficial or unbalanced. Limited use of evidence and limited application to real world implications. Conclusion is weak or descriptive rather than reasoned. Some relevant terminology used inconsistently.	**5-8**
Level 1 Very limited knowledge and understanding. Discussion is largely descriptive with little or no evaluation. No coherent conclusion. Little or no use of specialist terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditworthy material.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Restraint theory and the boundary model explain failure as a consequence of cognitive restraint and a discrete boundary; when dieters perceive a breach they show disinhibition and overeat.
- AO1: Ironic processes theory proposes active suppression increases the accessibility of forbidden thoughts, increasing craving and the chance of lapse.
- AO1: Other cognitive factors include habit and cue reactivity, executive control, and the impact of low calorie sweeteners disrupting appetite regulation.
- AO1: Social and situational cues such as peer modelling, abundance of food, alcohol and stress are environmental triggers that interact with cognitive vulnerability to produce lapses.
- AO3: Supporting evidence includes laboratory studies showing that restrained eaters consume more after a preload or alcohol prime, consistent with disinhibition and boundary breach. Experimental studies of thought suppression show rebound effects on accessibility of suppressed food thoughts, in line with ironic processes.
- AO3: Challenging evidence includes findings that not all restrained eaters binge, indicating individual differences such as high cognitive control or adaptive habits; ecological validity of laboratory taste tests is limited and may not reflect long term dieting outcomes.
- AO3: Methodological evaluation: laboratory experiments provide causal evidence but often use small, student samples and artificial tasks; naturalistic and longitudinal studies are needed to assess sustained dieting success and real world triggers.
- AO3: Ethical considerations when provoking lapses in vulnerable participants and the importance of debriefing and support.
- AO3: Practical applications include designing interventions that reduce exposure to cues, train alternative coping strategies, strengthen executive control, and avoid instructing thought suppression; using gradual habit change rather than strict cognitive restraint.
- Conclusion guidance: the theories together offer a useful, complementary account where cognitive restraint and boundary effects explain vulnerability, ironic processes explain why suppression can backfire, and situational and individual cognitive differences determine whether a lapse occurs. However, limitations in external validity and individual differences mean these explanations are not wholly sufficient on their own.