

Title of Presentation: Orthorexia in the Digital Age: Exploring Behavioral Immune System Perspective and Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Pathways

Abstract: Orthorexia nervosa is an emerging yet still conceptually debated construct at the intersection of eating-related psychopathology, obsessive–compulsive tendencies, and health-related anxiety. Rather than being limited to dietary patterns, orthorexia is increasingly understood as a potential expression of broader cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes shaped by modern informational environments. This presentation develops a unified conceptual framework grounded in the Behavioral Immune System. Within this perspective, orthorexia is conceptualized as a potential outcome of overactivated disease-avoidance mechanisms. Cognitive vulnerabilities such as rumination and obsessive beliefs are proposed to amplify perceived health threats, thereby increasing contamination sensitivity and strengthening avoidance-related behavioral tendencies. These cognitive processes are closely linked with affective mechanisms, particularly disgust and threat sensitivity, which function as core components of pathogen-avoidance behavior. In turn, these processes may translate into behavioral manifestations related to rigid food selection and heightened health monitoring. The framework further incorporates the role of digital environments, where cyberchondria and online health information seeking may continuously reinforce threat perception and maintain maladaptive cognitive–affective cycles. From this perspective, orthorexia is understood as a transdiagnostic phenomenon spanning obsessive–compulsive, eating disorder, and anxiety-related symptom dimensions. Finally, post-pandemic shifts in health moralization are considered, highlighting how food-related choices may acquire moral and identity-based meanings. Methodological limitations in the current literature are briefly addressed, alongside the need for improved construct validity, transparent research practices, and multi-method approaches capturing real-time cognitive and behavioral dynamics.

Short Bio: İrem Uyar is a Research Assistant in the Department of Psychology at Istanbul Gelisim University and a PhD candidate in Social Psychology at Bursa Uludağ University. She received her bachelor's degree in Psychology from Bursa Uludağ University and her MSc in Clinical Psychology from Istanbul Medipol University. Her master's thesis, *“A Path from Ruminative Thinking to Orthorexia: Examining the Role of Obsessive Beliefs, Health Anxiety, and Cyberchondria,”* examined cognitive and affective processes associated with orthorexic tendencies. Her research focuses on health-related cognition, cyberchondria, and digital environments, alongside broader social and cultural dimensions of psychological processes.