



The Effects of Goal Setting and Parenting Style on Healthy Eating Habits

Nicole Jabourian
Department of Psychology, California Lutheran University

Dr. Marylie Gerson
Sponsoring Faculty
Department of Psychology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of goal setting and parenting style on healthy eating habits. In a 2 x 2 mixed factorial design study, 96 undergraduate college students were randomly assigned to either create a list of goals related to their eating habits, relationships at home, activity levels or list three activities they completed the previous day. I predicted that there would be a significant interaction between the parenting style of one’s mother (authoritarian or authoritative) and exposure to an eating goal exercise (present or not) in their impact on plans for healthy eating such that students with authoritarian mothers will score low on plans for healthy eating unless they are exposed to the eating goal exercise, whereas students with authoritative mothers will score high regardless of whether they are exposed to the exercise. Contrary to predictions, there was a significant interaction between the parenting style and goal in their impact on plans for healthy eating, but students with authoritative mothers scored relatively low regardless of whether they were exposed to the exercise.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, Americans’ diets have become increasingly high in fat and sugar. With many factors possibly contributing, people may perceive themselves as having little or no control over their dietary habits. What impact might this lack of control have on an individual? In particular, would goal setting and parenting style have an effect on healthy eating habits? Given the prevalence of unhealthy food consumption and dietary restraint among Americans, it is important to investigate potential adverse effects of this experience. Previous research has examined the relationship between goal setting, parenting styles, and corresponding levels of healthy eating habits. Enten and Golan (2009) investigated the association between parenting style and eating disorder symptoms in patients treated in an intensive outpatient center for eating disorders. They concluded that those raised by authoritarian mothers had the most difficult recovery when suffering with an eating disorder. Similarly, Lobera et al. (2011) analyzed the effects that parental bonding has on eating disorder patients, looking at the relationship among the different styles of the parental bonding and some psychological and psychopathological variables. Results found that those who suffered from eating disorders and were raised with overprotective, controlling parents were more likely to use negative coping styles than those raised by authoritative parents. Furthermore, Topham et al. (2011) explored the relationship between parenting style, parent response to negative child emotion, family emotional expressiveness, and familial support to child emotional eating. They found that children who were raised by authoritarian parents and experienced lower parental warmth and support were more likely to engage in emotional eating habits. However, Kalavana (2010) investigated the influence of interpersonal and personal factors on unhealthy eating in adolescents and found that goal efficacy and goal ownership were significantly positively related to healthy eating behavior. Since goal setting was found to be an effective intervention tool, the current study aimed to identify the effects of parenting style and goal setting on healthy eating habits.

HYPOTHESES

There will be a significant interaction between the parenting style of one’s mother (authoritarian or authoritative) and exposure to an eating goal exercise (present or not) in their impact on plans for healthy eating.

Students with authoritarian mothers will score low on plans for healthy eating unless they are exposed to the eating goal exercise, whereas students with authoritative mothers will score high regardless of whether they are exposed to the exercise.

METHOD

Participants

- Approximately 32 undergraduates at California Lutheran University
- To increase power, data were copied and pasted three times, generating a total of 96 participants (18 male, 78 female)
- 19-46 years of age ($M = 21.44$ years, $SD = 4.63$)
- 81% female ($n = 78$), 19% male ($n = 18$)
- Caucasian (52.6%), followed by Black or African American ($n = 3$, 3.1%), Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 6$, 6.2%), Hispanic or Latino/a ($n = 33$, 34%), and Other ($n = 3$, 3.1%)
- The average number of siblings that participants had was 1.75 ($SD = 1.40$)
- Average number of days in which one participated in some form of exercise was 3.50 days per week ($SD = 2.02$). Some participants received extra credit as compensation for their participation.

Materials

- Informed Consent Form
- Background Questionnaire
- Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1989; 1991).
- Goal-Setting/Daily Activity Task
- Eating Attitudes Test (Garner et al., 1982)

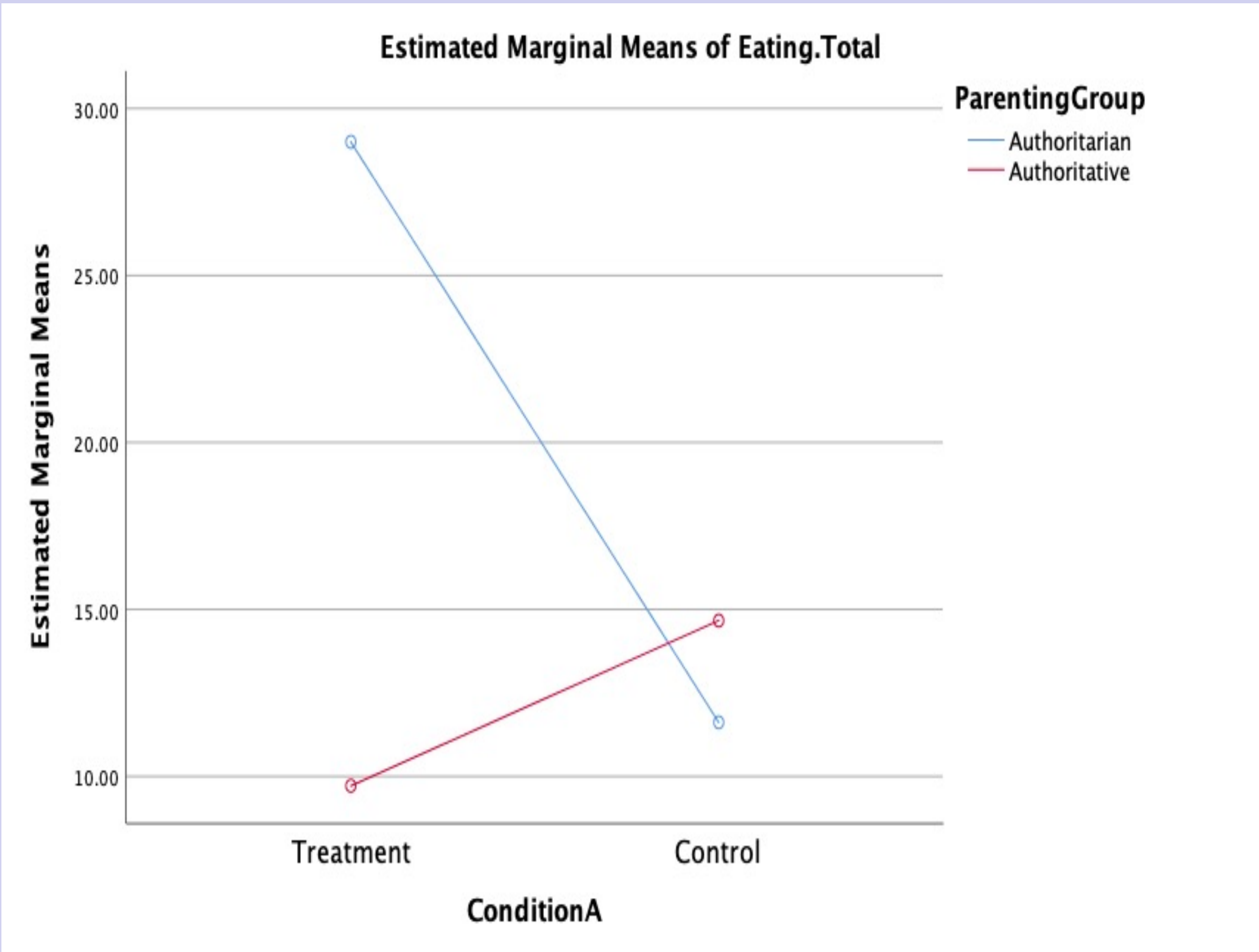
Procedure

1. Signed up for study on SONA system and clicked on Qualtrics link.
2. Informed consent.
3. Answered demographic form signed questions regarding age, gender, education level, ethnicity, number of children or dependents in the family, and the number of days per week in which one participates in some form of exercise.
4. Completed Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1989; 1991)
5. Randomly assigned to either Treatment or Control group.
 - a. **Treatment** → Constructed list of goals related to eating habits, relationships at home, and activity levels
 - b. **Control** → Constructed list of three activities they completed on the day prior to completing the study.
5. Completed Eating Attitudes Test (Garner et al., 1982)
6. Participants were thanked for completing the study.

RESULTS

- The hypothesis was tested with a univariate two-way ANOVA and size of effect was determined by partial eta-squared.
- As predicted, a significant main effect was found for Treatment, $F(1, 73) = 6.13, p = .016$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.08$, with a medium effect size. A significant main effect was found for Parenting Group, $F(1, 73) = 10.45, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.13$, with a large effect size.
 - Participants who received the treatment had healthier eating habits ($M = 11.37, SD = 7.50$) than participants in the control group ($M = 13.14, SD = 8.84$)
- A significant main effect was found for Parenting Group, $F(1, 73) = 10.45, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.13$, with a large effect size.
 - Participants who were raised by authoritarian parents had healthier eating habits than those who were raised by authoritative parents ($M = 12.34, SD = 8.26$).
- Treatment interacted significantly with Parenting Group, $F(1, 73) = 19.77, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$, with a large effect size.
 - Participants who had an authoritarian mother and received treatment ($M = 29.00, SD = 0.00$) scored highest on healthy eating.
 - Participants with an authoritarian mother in the control group ($M = 11.62, SD = 6.38$), participants with an authoritative mother in the treatment group ($M = 9.72, SD = 5.37$), and participants with an authoritative mother in the control group ($M = 14.67, SD = 10.71$) all scored relatively low on healthy eating.

FINDINGS



DISCUSSION

Hypotheses were not fully supported. Although students with authoritarian mothers did score low on plans for healthy eating unless they were exposed to the eating goal exercise, students with authoritative mothers scored relatively low regardless of whether they were exposed to the exercise.

Possible reasons include:

- Only one participant was in the authoritarian mother and treatment group because the sample had been tripled, making the finding difficult to interpret.
- Small sample size ($n = 32$)
 - low statistical power and generalizability
 - data in the current study were copied and pasted three times to increase sample size and power ($n = 96$)
 - Using falsified data would make lower statistical power and make it the results less valid and reliable.
- Most participants were women.
 - generalizability and external validity of the study would decrease.

•Future research could:

- Examine the effect of a permissive authoritarian style on healthy eating habits.
 - Hypothesis: those raised by permissive parents would report unhealthy eating habits unless they were exposed to a goal setting intervention exercise.
- Examine gender as a moderator of the effect of sugar on memory.
 - Hypothesis: men would not be as likely as women to base their eating habits on the way in which they were raised.