

Influence of Source and Reason on Likelihood of Dietary Behavior



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Psychology 497: Research Seminar
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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify how reason for dieting and source of dietary information influence the likelihood to engage in dietary behavior. Research by Thomsen, McCoy, Gustafson, & Williams, M. (2002) shows that as frequency of reading popular magazines increases, motivation for self-improvement also increases. Research by Gerner & Wilson (2005) aimed to identify the relationship between friendship and weight concerns and control over eating behavior. Females are highly likely to diet when a female friend influences them, because they believe it will enhance the friendship and peer status. The Elaboration Likelihood Model states that individuals are more likely to accept a message if they have previous knowledge on the topic and if the source provokes a positive reaction (Cook, Moore, & Steel, 2004). Although little research has been conducted on attitudes towards professionals and the relation to dieting, advice from a doctor is widely accepted as being accurate and creditable.

Hypotheses

Main effect for source of dietary information. Dieting will be influenced from whom the individual receives advice. Main effect for reason for dieting. When people are concerned about their well-being, they will be more likely to diet for health reasons than for weight loss. Interaction between source and reason. The type of advice resulting in dietary behavior will be influenced by the individual's reasoning to diet.

Method

Design

2 x 3 mixed design

Reason for dieting (between) and source of dietary information (within) as the two independent variables
Likelihood to engage in dietary behavior was the dependent variable.

Participants

60 undergraduate students (including 1 graduate student) were obtained by means of Sona System or by volunteering. Ages ranged from 18 to 24 with a median age of 19, and the class standing of 62% of all participants were freshman.

Results

A Cronbach's alpha was preformed and indicated that all five questions were highly related, Cronbach's alpha=0.748. In order to investigate possible covariates, each demographic variable was correlated with the DV, none of which showed a significant correlation.

A 2 x 3 mixed ANOVA was preformed. There was no significant main effect for reason for dieting, but there was a main effect for source of information, $F(58) = .0001, p < .05$. Individuals were more likely to engage in dietary behavior if the advice came from a professional ($M=4.3467$) than from a friend ($M=3.6333$) or the media ($M=3.2167$).

The Tukey HSD showed that the means for the levels of source of information were significantly different from each other. There was no interaction between reason for dieting and source of dietary information. Refer to Table 1 for a graph of means of all conditions.

Discussion

Partially supports Jeffery, Kelly, Rothman, Sherwood, & Boutelle, (2004). Individuals are more likely to take advice from a professional if they are concerned about health.

Supports Elaboration Likelihood Model (Cook et al. 2004). Guidance from a friend, to whom you have prior positive feelings, is influential on decision-making. Also supports Gerner and Wilson's (2005) claim that females will diet to achieve emotional and social approval from significant others, such as a close friend.

Partially supports Thomsen et al. (2002). However, it should be noted that the focus of the current study was not to discredit a source for being insignificant, but rather to identify which source resulted in the highest measurement of likelihood to engage in dietary behavior.

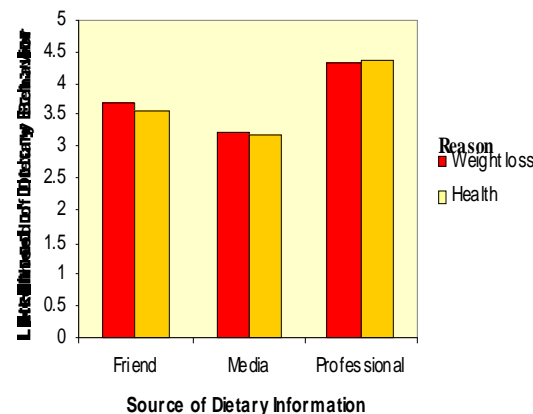
Unlike what was predicted, the combination of reason for dieting and source of dietary information did not affect dietary behavior in a systematic way. The lack of an interaction might be due to the fact that dieting has become a normalized aspect of college-aged women in American society, and the reasoning behind dieting has become of less importance. Future research should measure dietary behavior in the male population, because they hold different views about dieting than females, which could result in a variance of measurement. For example, men tend to be more reserved when it comes to issues that have primarily been considered in the past to be female oriented, such as diet and weight loss.

Procedure

The cover sheet was the first page of the questionnaire and acted as informed consent. The 15-item questionnaire had two versions pertaining to dieting for either weight loss or health. Both included scenarios describing a professional, friend, and media as sources of dietary information. The participants responded on a five-point Likert type scale to each of the five questions following the scenarios; 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Demographics included age, class standing. The participants were also asked if they were currently on a diet or if they planned to diet in the near future.

Table 1



References

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