



Priming, and the effect it can have on obesity rates

Link to an experiment done by
Derren Brown about subliminal
advertising and priming

Jacob Fullmer
Mrs. Naylor

Priming: What is it and how is it used?

Priming, not unlike subliminal advertising, is a term used by psychologists to describe something which subconsciously affects a person's decisions and can influence them to do something they wouldn't have originally done.

Large corporations have been utilizing priming in commercials and other advertisements to convince consumers to buy their products for years – (Naylor, 2017)

Why is this of concern?

Studies have been conducted that show the effect that priming has on both children and adults that are seeing these advertisements, and it is clear that “food-priming” has the effect of encouraging people to both eat more, and to eat things that are worse for you. A study done by J.L. Harris showcases this by providing us with the amount of goldfish that children ate while watching shows, with some children seeing advertisements pertaining to food, and some seeing advertisements not related to food.

The children who saw the advertisements relating to food ate, on average, 50% more goldfish than the children who did not have food-related advertisements. – (Harris, 2009)



What can we do?

Studies show that children relate most to characters from their favorite TV shows and movies, with children wanting to emulate those characters and be similar to them

In a study done through the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, children were exposed to three different characters, an overweight character, a normal weight character, and a control, which was a coffee mug. After performing a task which was unrelated, the children were allowed to leave and left to take candies from a bowl with no supervision.

As expected, children that were exposed to the overweight character took nearly double the amount of candy that the children exposed to the other characters were. – (Campbell, 2016)



We can counteract this effect by promoting characters who make good dietary decisions and reducing the overall number of overweight characters that children are exposed to

How can it be used for good?

A study done by E.K Papies showcases the uses priming can have to enhance self control in individuals by utilizing certain smells

The study shows that through the use of smells, people can be motivated to eat less – (Papies, 2010)

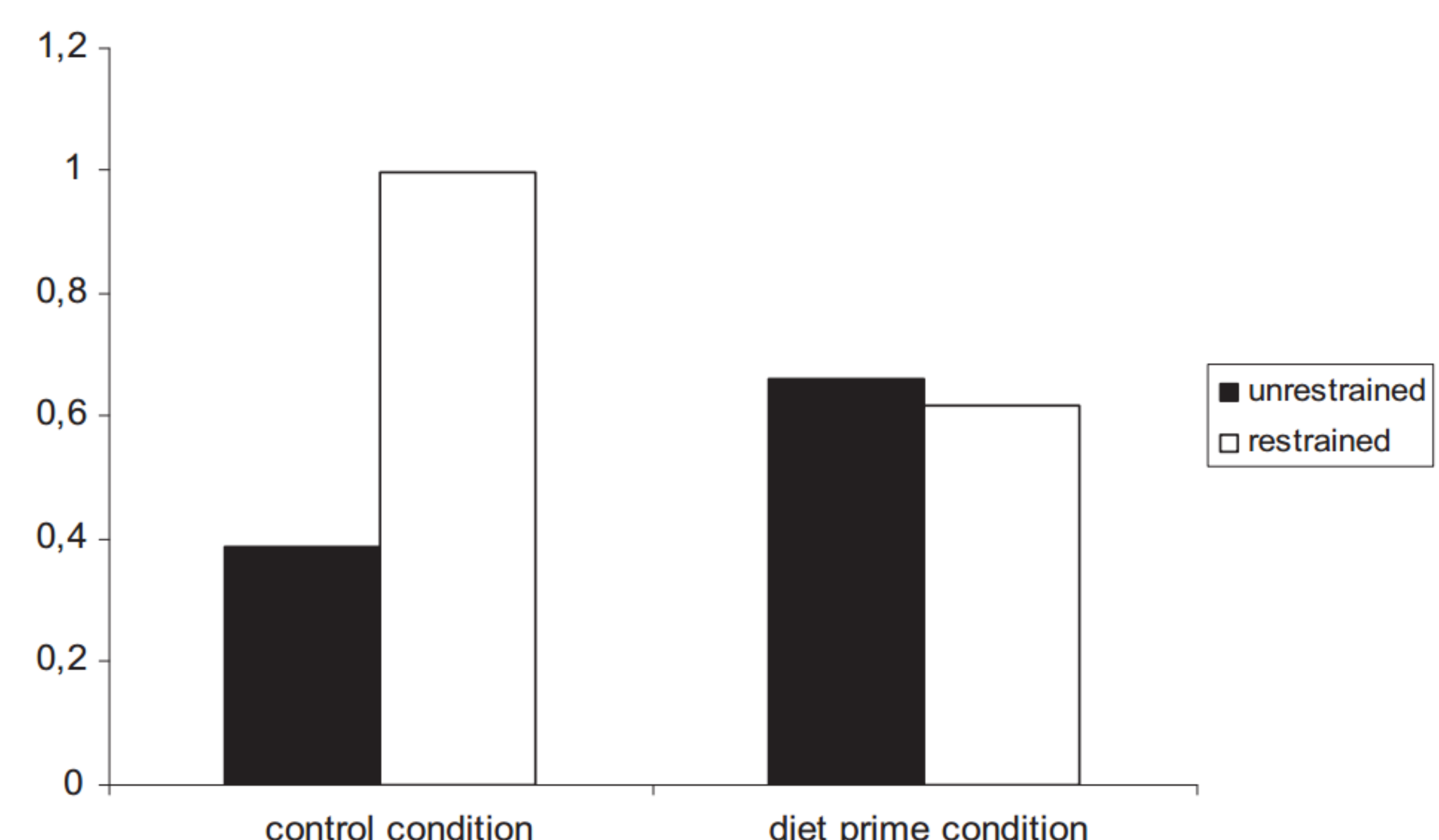


Figure 1. Mean number of meat snacks consumed by restrained eaters (1 SD above the mean, see Aiken & West, 1991) and unrestrained eaters (1 SD below the mean) in the control and diet prime conditions.

*Restrained: Shown an advertisement for a “healthy snack”
Unrestrained: No advertisement shown
Control condition: Smell of barbecue chicken wafting through air
Diet prime condition: No smell given