

Don't Succumb to my Temptations: Social Avoidance as a Strategy to Protect Valued Goals

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Literature Review & Abstract

How do we socially interact with someone who is indulging in a tempting piece of chocolate cake? Do we approach or avoid them, and why? Some research suggests we may approach and befriend indulgers (Helmreich, Aronson, & LeFan, 1970; Lowe & Haws, 2014; Rawn & Vohs, 2011; Tesser, 1988). Other research suggests we may devalue and avoid indulgers (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Lewin, 1935; Myrseth, Fishbach, & Trope, 2009; Rosenberg, 1956). We explore a novel mechanism for social avoidance of indulgers: influence beliefs. Indulgents may disrupt an observer's own goal pursuit (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Christakis & Fowler, 2007; Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012). Thus, we hypothesize observers avoid indulgers due to a belief the indulger will be a negative influence on observer's own goals – particularly as a goal to restrain behavior is increasingly important to the observer.

Five studies across multiple domains (i.e., drinking, spending, cursing, eating) test our hypothesis. We find that observers avoid social targets who act indulgently (vs. those who exercise restraint). Further, indulgers are avoided because observers believe that such targets could negatively influence observers' own goal-directed behaviors. Our theory is further supported by evidence of moderation by both goal importance and goal expectancy. When the goal is more important to the observer, observers believe the indulger's influence on their own goal will be more negative, explaining amplified avoidance of indulgers. On the other hand, when observers have high goal expectancy (and therefore fewer concerns about external influences on their goals), avoidance of indulgers is attenuated. We conclude that avoidance of indulgers is a strategy used by observers to protect their valued goals.

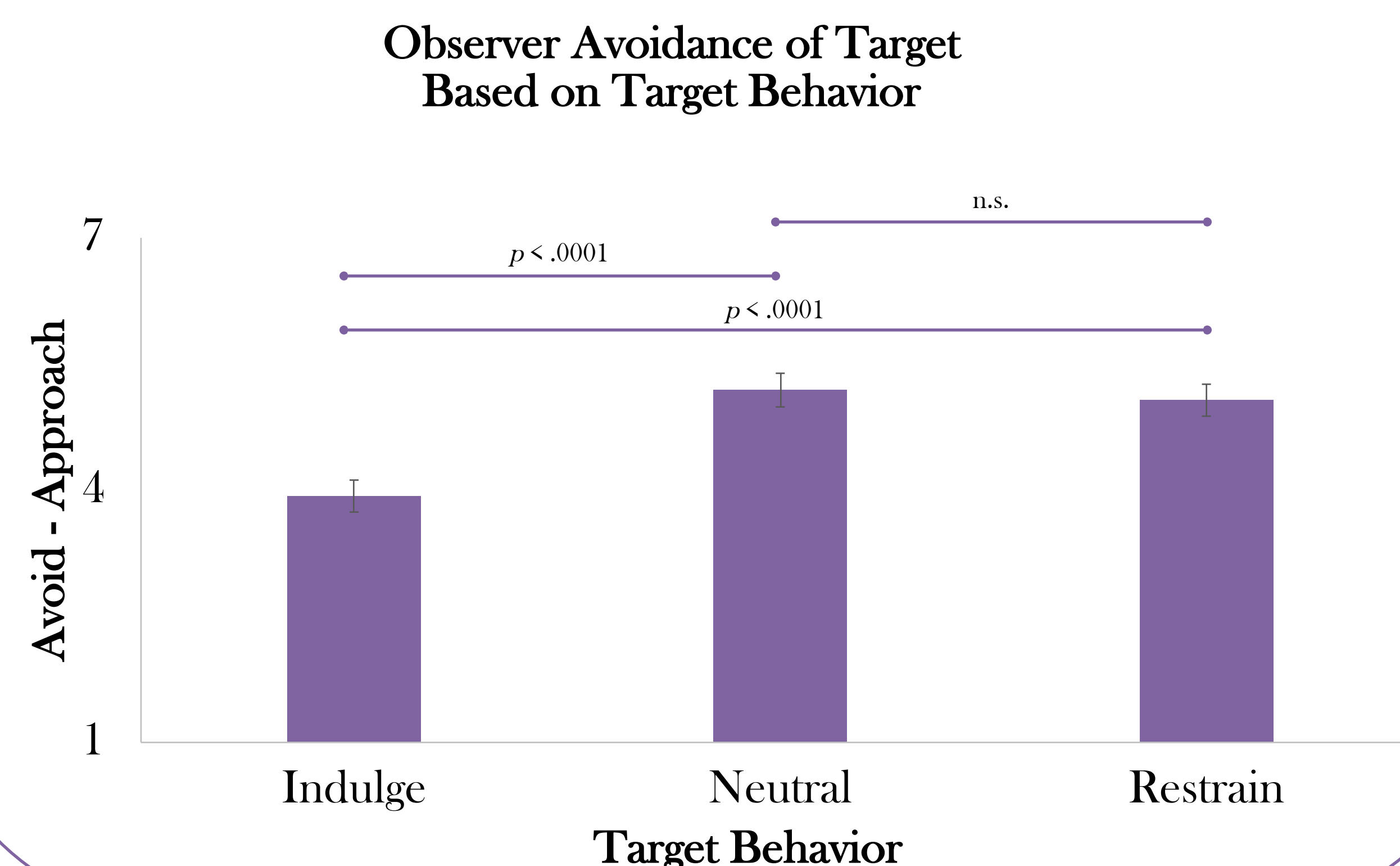
Study 1

Observers avoid targets who drink indulgently

Design: (Target Behavior: Indulge vs. Restrain vs. Neutral) between-subj. $N = 158$

DV: 8-item Avoidance index ($\alpha = .96$)

Stimuli: "You and Alex strike up a conversation about your interests and hobbies. Alex is only drinking half a bottle of beer [has had quite a few drinks already and has another bottle of beer in hand]."



Study 2

Observers avoid targets who spend indulgently, particularly when financial goals are important to the observer, due to beliefs that the target could be a negative influence on observer's own goal-directed behavior

Design: (Target Behavior: Indulge vs. Restrain) between-subject

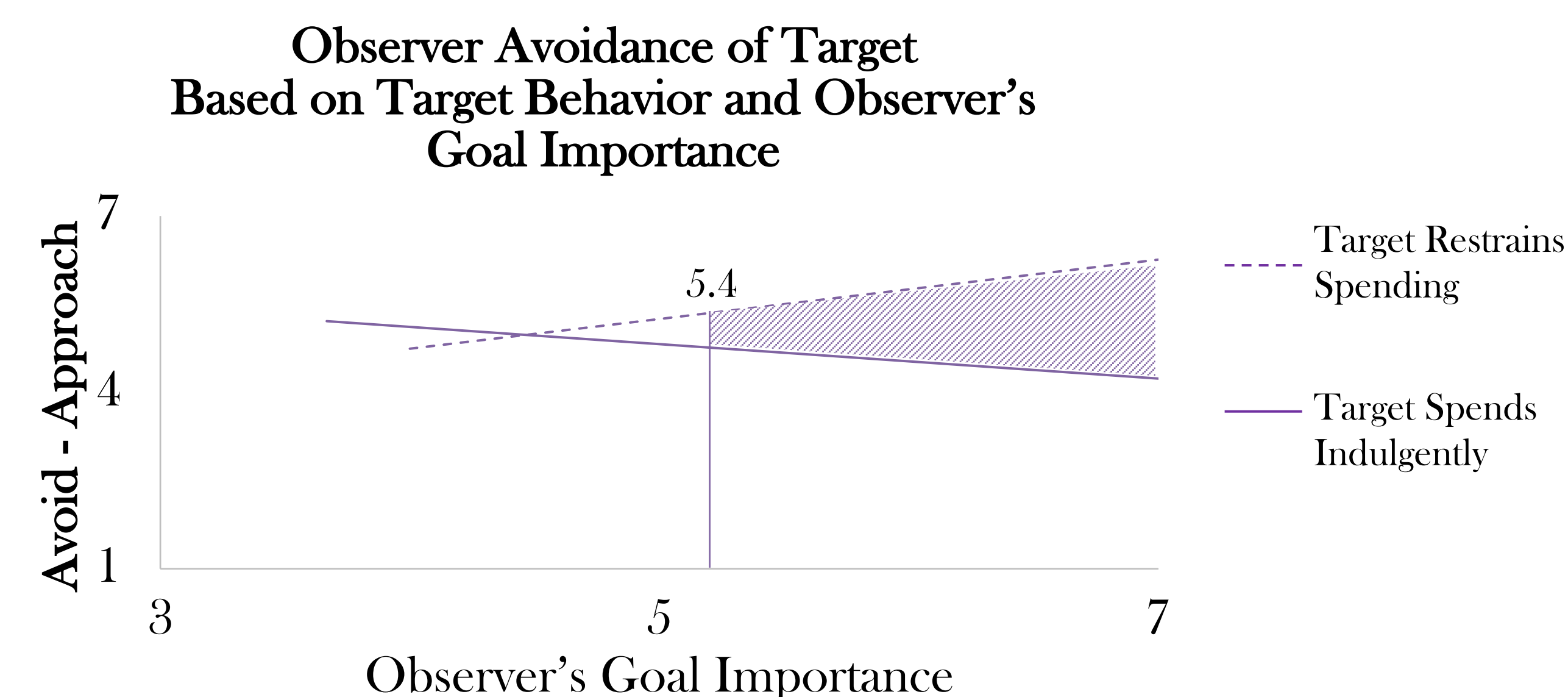
$N = 84$

DV: 8-item Avoidance index ($\alpha = .97$)

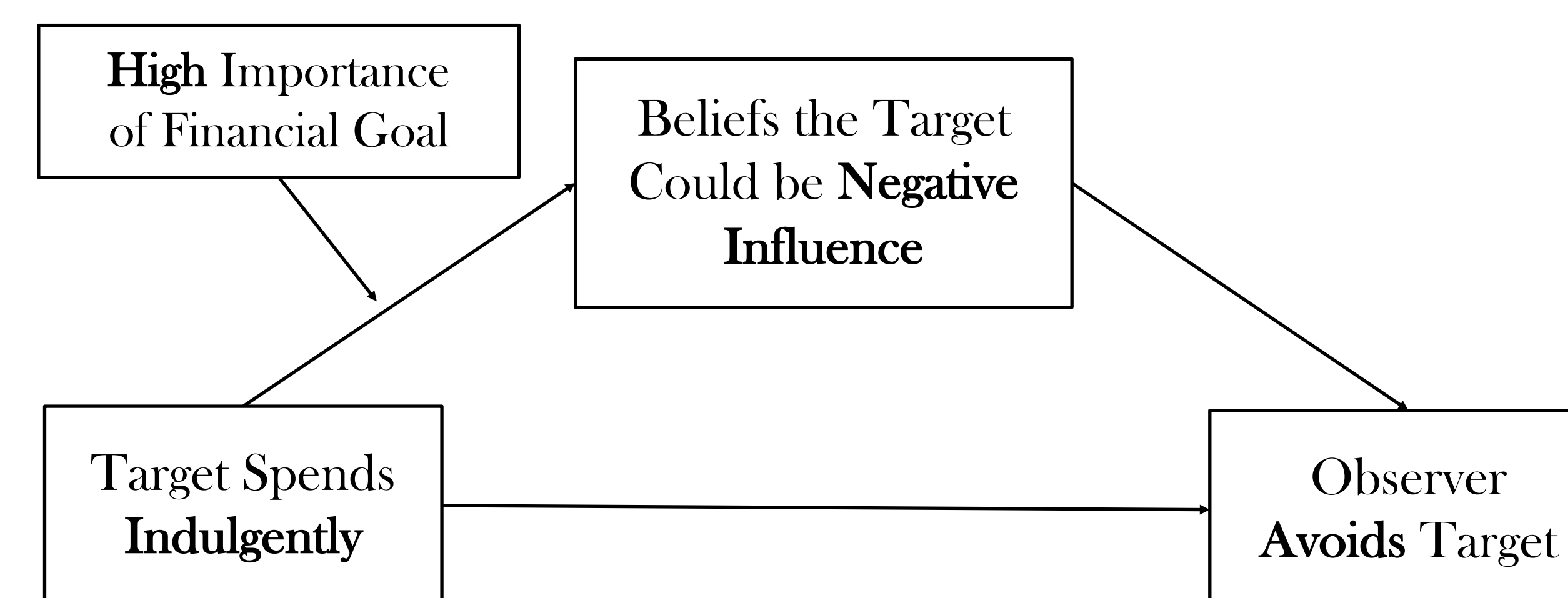
Mediator: 5-item Influence Beliefs index ($\alpha = .93$)

Moderator: 3-item Goal Importance ($\alpha = .80$)

Stimuli: "Alex is drinking a glass of fine [house] wine...orders one of the most [least] expensive entrées...and takes a taxi [public transportation] home"



Johnson-Neyman Region of Significance: Goal Importance ≥ 5.38



Index of moderated mediation: $\beta = .34$, $SE = .11$,
95% bootstrap CI: [.1474, .5845]

Study 3

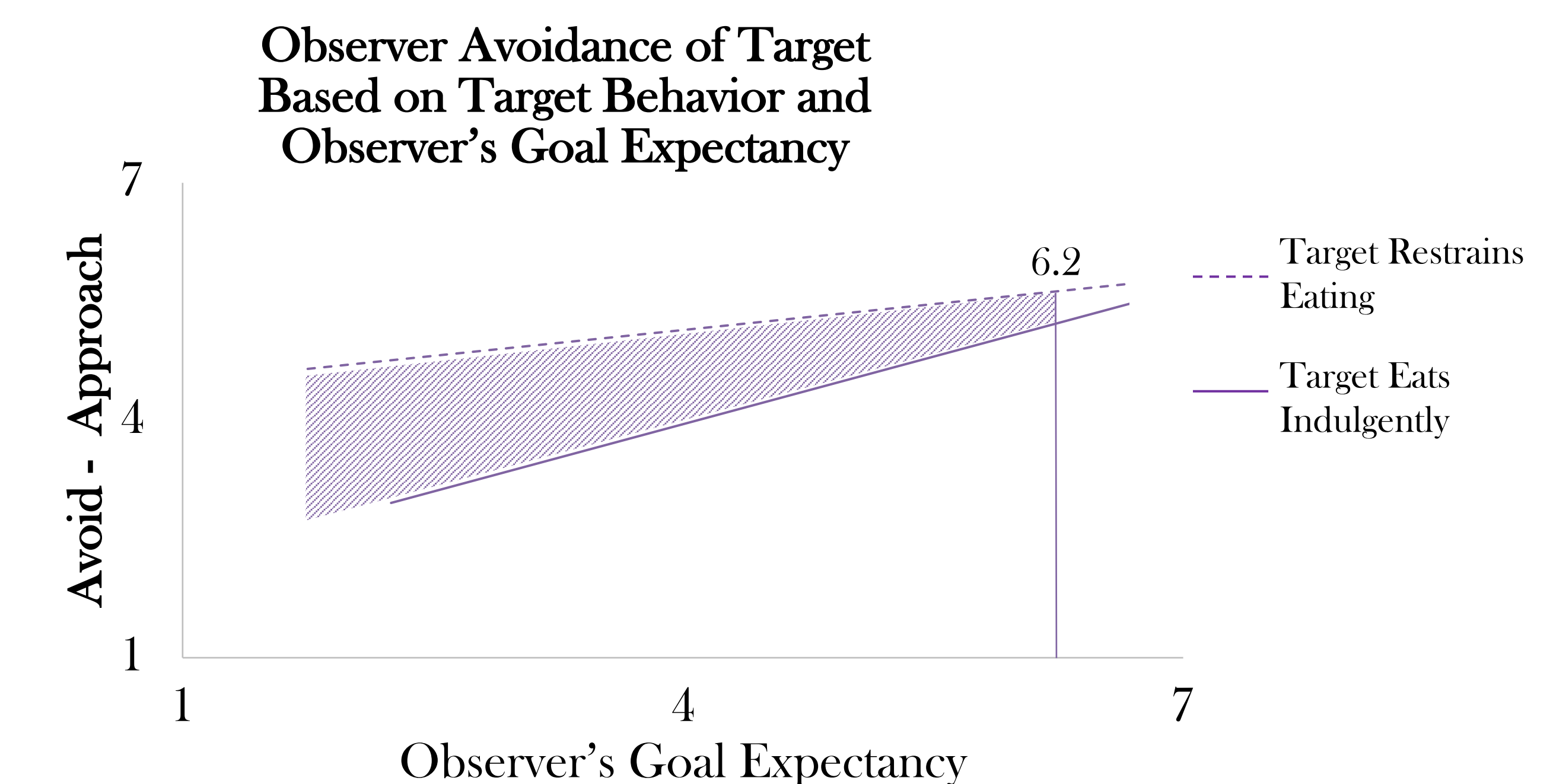
Observers' avoidance of targets who indulge is attenuated when goal expectancy is high

Design: (Target Behavior: Indulge vs. Restrain) between-subject $N = 158$

DV: 8-item Avoidance index ($\alpha = .94$)

Moderator: 4-item Goal Expectancy ($\alpha = .89$)

Stimuli: "Alex orders one of the least [most] healthy entrees...and orders a brownie [fruit salad] for dessert."



Johnson-Neyman Region of Significance: Goal Expectancy ≤ 6.21

References & Further Reading

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