

# Differences in Eating Competence Scores Between College Students With Different Weight-Related Goals



Mallory Robertson, BS and Jesse Stable Morrell, PhD  
Department of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems

## Introduction

- Society's idealization of thinness and today's diet culture are increasing the prevalence of weight loss goals in college students.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Individuals with weight loss goals engage in increased levels of restriction, fad dieting, and other unhealthy weight loss strategies.<sup>3</sup>
- Eating competence is defined as being "positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating" and having an overall healthy relationship with food.<sup>4</sup>
- Eating competence is divided into four subscales: eating attitudes, internal regulation, contextual skills, and food acceptance.<sup>4</sup>
- Reduced eating competence is associated with decreased diet quality and self esteem as well as increased risk for eating disorders.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Objective

**To assess the differences in eating competence scores between college students with different weight-related goals.**

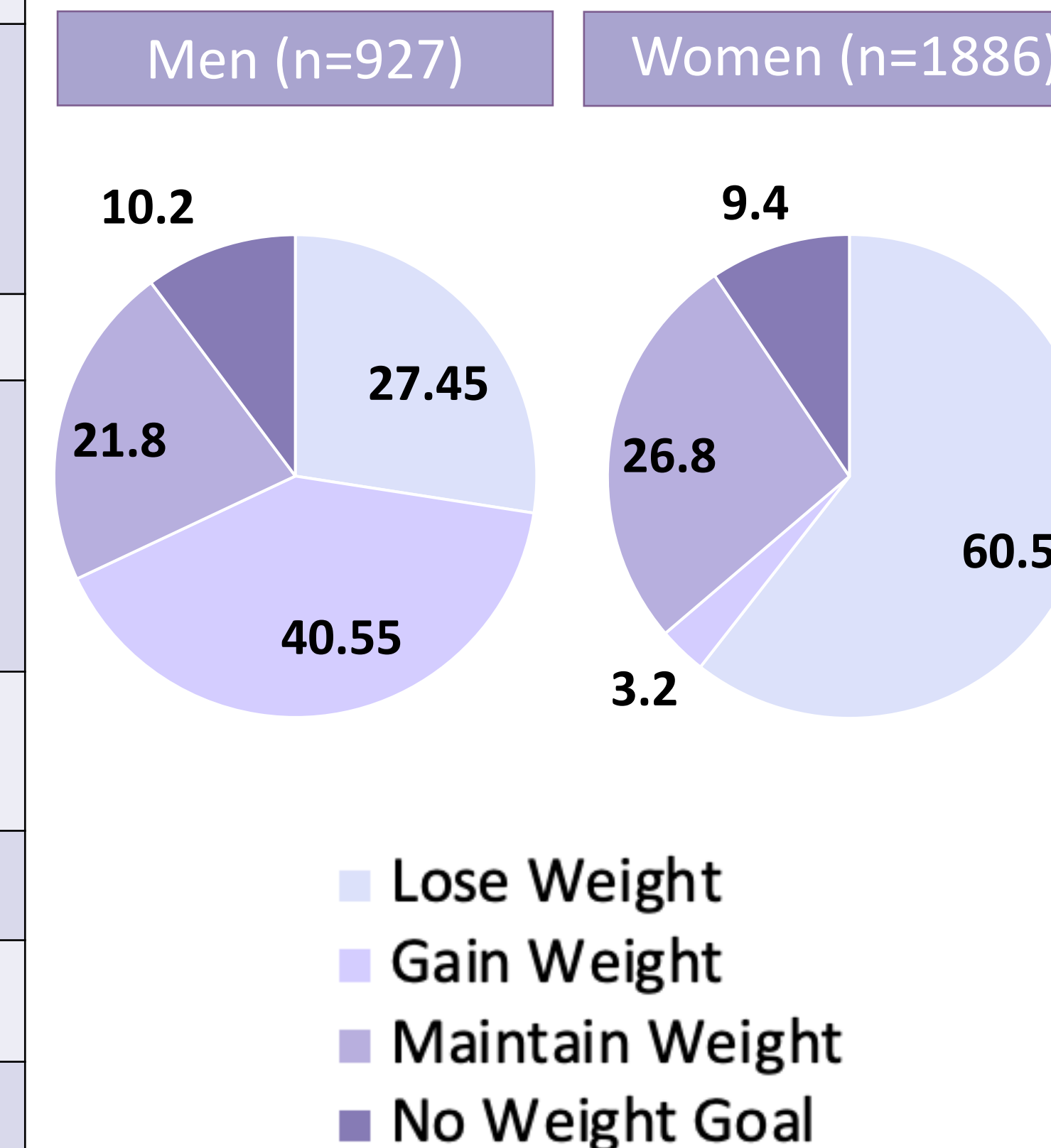
## Methods

- Data were collected from 2015-2021 from the College Health and Nutrition Assessment Survey, a recurring cross-sectional study at UNH (IRB #5524).
- Participants completed the validated 16-item Eating Competence Satter Inventory (ecSI 2.0™) and reported weight-related goals through an online questionnaire.
- Total ecSI scores (0-48) were used to categorize students as eating competent at  $\geq 32$ .
- Differences in mean ecSI scores between students grouped by weight related goals (1) lose weight, 2) gain weight, 3) maintain weight, and 4) no goal) were examined via ANCOVA using BMI, gender, and class standing as covariates (SPSS v.27,  $p < .05$ ).

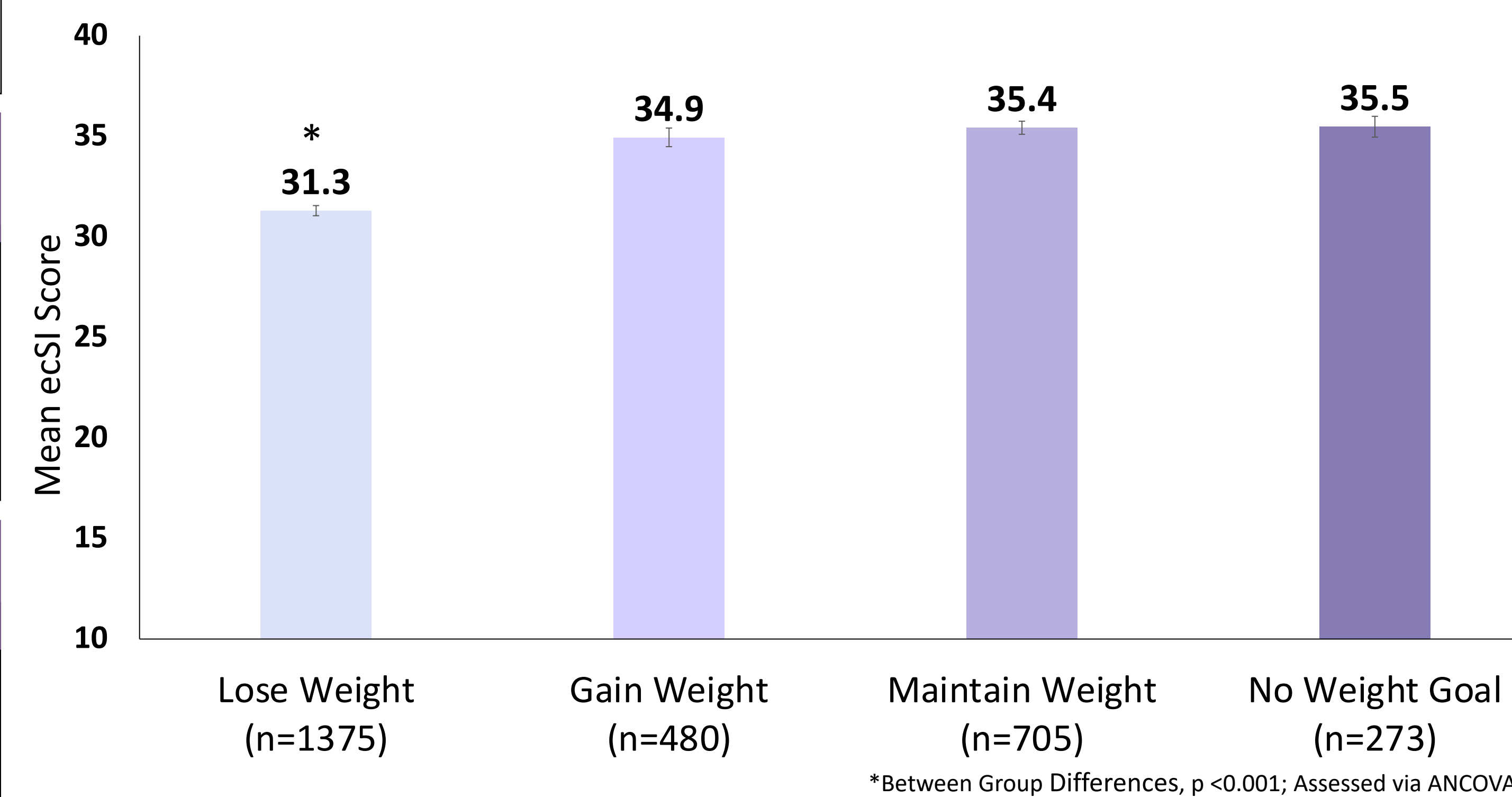
## Participant Characteristics

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| n(% male/female)            | 2813(35.5/64.5) |
| Race (n(%))                 |                 |
| White                       | 2709(96.3)      |
| Other                       | 104(3.7)        |
| BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> ±SE) | 23.5±3.8        |
| Class Standing (n(%))       |                 |
| Freshmen                    | 1356(48.2)      |
| Other                       | 1457(51.8)      |
| Total ecSI Score (ecSI±SD)  | 33.3±8.8        |
| Lose Weight (n(%))          | 1375(49.0)      |
| Gain Weight (n(%))          | 480(16.4)       |
| Maintain Weight (n(%))      | 705(25.0)       |
| No Weight Goal (n(%))       | 273(9.7)        |

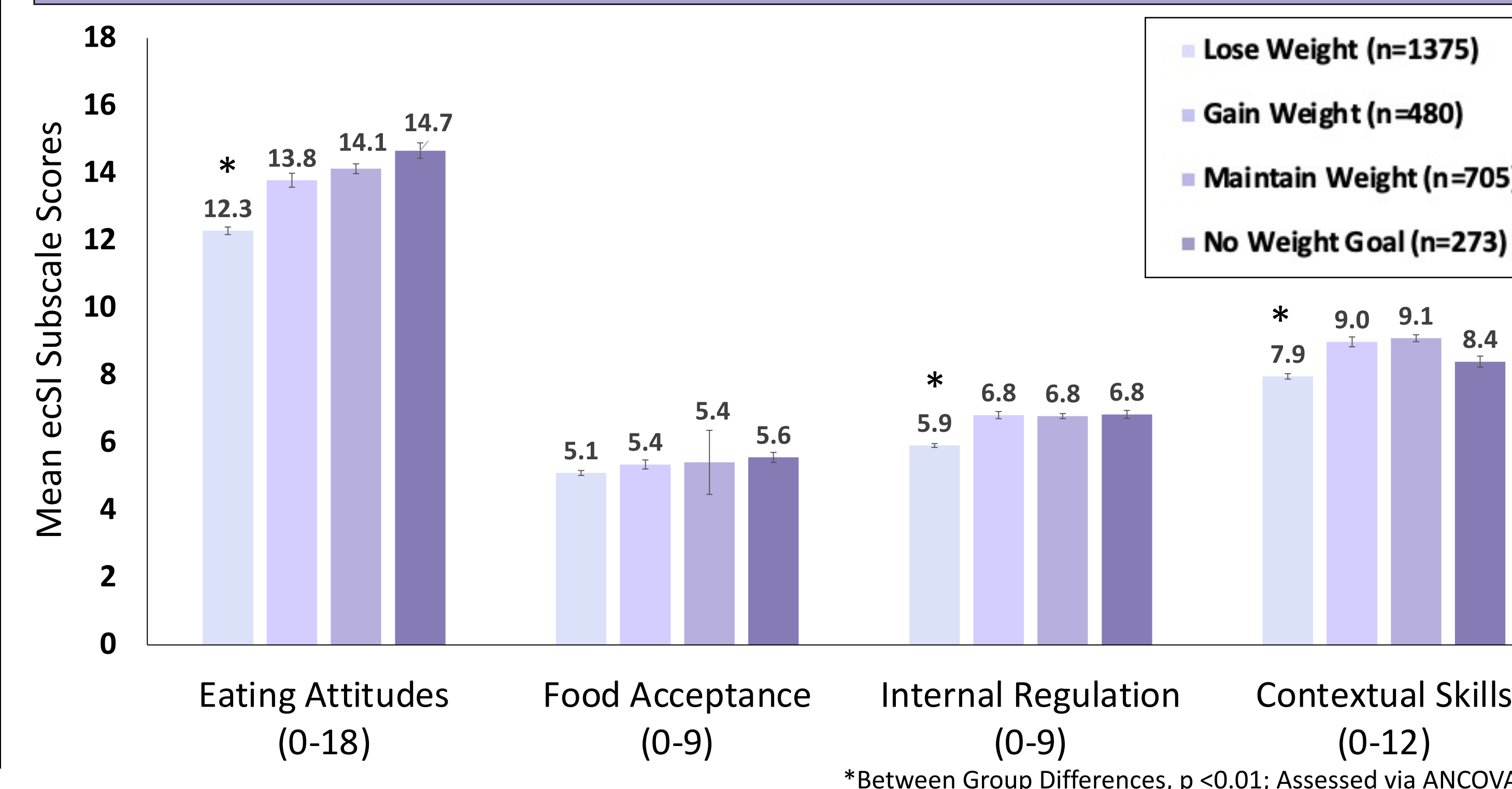
## Weight-Related Goals in College Men and Women



## Mean ecSI Scores by Weight-Related Goal



## Mean ecSI Subscale Scores by Weight-Related Goal



## Key Findings

- Almost half of college students had a weight loss goal.
- Participants with a weight loss goal tended to have a lower mean ecSI score in comparison to students who wanted to gain weight, maintain weight, or had no weight-related goals.
- Three of the four subscale scores (eating attitudes, internal regulation, & contextual skills) were lower in students with a weight loss goal compared to the other groups.
- Two of every five students were considered non-eating competent.

## Conclusion

College students with weight loss goals reported lower eating competence in comparison to other students.

## Take Away

**To promote health and well-being, college professionals and health educators should consider the potential negative impacts that weight loss goals have on college students' overall relationship with eating.**

## Acknowledgements

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