

THE SOCIAL NORMS THEORY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING  
WEIGHT CONTROL BEHAVIOR AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS (185 PP.)

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The present study used the Social Norms Theory as a framework for assessing weight control behavior among college students. This was the first known investigation to assess sex- and salient-specific normative beliefs about weight control behavior among college students. The purpose of the study was to determine if sex- and salient-specific weight control norms would have significant independent relationships with weight control behavior among college women and men after adjusting for the effects of body mass index (BMI) and socio-demographic measures.

The sample consisted of 470 college female and male students, ages 18-26, attending either a 2-year community college or a 4-year university. A self-report questionnaire was developed to extract the data. The height and weight of each participant were objectively measured to calculate BMI.

Discriminant function analyses were conducted separately for college women and men to test the ability of the weight control norm variables, BMI, and socio-demographic measures to distinguish between the low-, medium-, and high-involvement weight control groups. The analyses clearly indicated that weight control norms of same-sex, close friends were the best discriminators of weight control behavior among both college women and men. Findings of the analyses supported the hypothesis of the study.

Perceived peer norms among college students may be important risk factors for engaging in unhealthy weight control behavior. The Social Norms Theory is a potentially valuable framework for understanding weight control behavior among college students.