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2020

Examining gender differences in young men and women's goals for a technology-driven weight loss intervention

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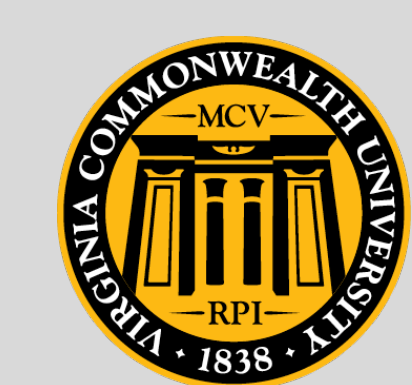
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Reading, Jean M.; Crane, Melissa M.; and LaRose, Jessica G., "Examining gender differences in young men and women's goals for a technology-driven weight loss intervention" (2020). *Graduate Research Posters*. Poster 99.

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Background

Young men are challenging to recruit into behavioral weight loss (BWL) programs

- Young adult men represent less than 20% of participants enrolled in BWL programs adapted for their age
- Low concerns about weight loss
- An issue across a consortium of trials targeting young adults

Recruitment messages for BWL programs are not resonating with men

- It's possible that men's goals for weight loss are not described in recruitment advertisements for programs

Understanding young men's goals surrounding weight loss can inform how to best tailor recruitment advertisements for BWL programs in order to improve enrollment among young men

Objective

To compare young men and women's personal goals in a technology-driven behavioral weight loss program

Methods

Procedure

- Data extracted from an RCT targeting young adults
- Sample of young adults age 18-25 with overweight or obesity
- Participants were recruited using a multi-method approach grounded in formative work with the population
- Young adults were randomized to one of three arms—all received a 6-month technology mediated intervention with content adapted for young adults

Measures

- Participants ranked their top 3 personal goals / areas for change during the program from a list of 15 options and a write-in option

Data Analysis

- Commonly reported areas (n=8) were coded yes/no if the goal was ranked in the top 3
- Chi-square tests were used to compare men and women on commonly reported goals for the program
- Bonferroni correction p-value <.006

Results

Sample (N=382)	% or Mean
Age	21.9 +/- 1.2 years
BMI (kg/m ²)	33.5 +/- 4.9
Female	83%
Racial/Ethnic Minority	58%
Working and in School	45%
Student only	22%
Working only	31%
Non-working / Non-student	2%

Commonly Ranked Goals (%)

Weight	62.7
Physical Fitness	43.7
Body Fat %	25.7
Body Shape	25.1
Energy Level	24.1
Clothing Size	19.6
Confidence	18.8
Self-Esteem	18.0

More than half of participants ranked weight as a goal for change

Weight and physical fitness were most common among goals

Commonly Ranked Top Goal (%)

Weight	43.5
Physical Fitness	11.3
Body Fat %	8.9

No significant differences were found between young men and women for personal goals

Discussion

- Young adults' primary goals in a BWL program are to lose weight and improve physical fitness
- No gender differences were observed for personal goals in a weight loss program
- These findings are not consistent with past literature showing young men have low concern about weight loss, which could be due to bias in the treatment seeking sample
- The findings align with past research showing physical fitness is a primary motivator among young men when it comes to improving health including weight loss

Limitations

Treatment seeking sample, which may not be representative of non-treatment seeking young men

Strengths

Diverse sample of young adults with respect to race, ethnicity, work and school status

Findings suggest that including messages surrounding physical fitness, not just weight loss, might enhance the appeal of behavioral weight loss for young adults. However, more research is clearly needed to understand the goals of non-treatment seeking young men in order to reach this vulnerable population.