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# Norm Mispercetion Among College Students at the University of Rhode Island

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**Abstract:**

College is generally considered to be the most exciting and enjoyable time of a young adult's life. It is a period where students typically expect to focus on academic learning and personal growth to prepare to be independent adults and valuable contributors to society. Unfortunately, the college population is vulnerable to developing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders (Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). The pressures of achieving high academic success while balancing a healthy social life are burdensome, and those students who also suffer from mental health issues face a greater challenge. Surprisingly, despite this issue, many colleges and universities do not offer adequate mental health resources to meet the demand (NEDA, 2013). While increasing the availability and options for mental health resources on college campuses is needed, it is also important to focus on prevention of mental health issues.

The purpose of this study is to address the issue of the development of eating disordered behavior on college campuses. Specifically, this study examines changes in norm misperception in terms of disordered eating behaviors across class years (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and help to identify possible developmental milestones associated with greater or lesser misperception. We used various measures to assess student's perception of importance of thinness (females), importance of muscularity (males), acceptability of unhealthy weight loss behaviors, and prevalence of disordered eating behaviors among peers. Although research related to the development of eating disorders on campus has been conducted numerous times, no study has yet to investigate class year as a factor of the development of such behaviors. The results of this study will be used to give us insight as to what measures to take the prevent the development of eating disorders on college campuses and how to promote a healthy body image among this population.

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