

Motivation for Weight Loss

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study focuses on the impact of types of initial diet and exercise motivation on weight loss in a group of urban black women who attended a 12-week clinic-based weight loss program. Seventeen program participants completed the Treatment Self-Regulation Questionnaire at the initial session. Weekly weights and pre-post blood pressure and body mass index values were obtained. Autonomous motivation for a healthy diet ($\beta = .77, P = .002$) and initial weight ($\beta = .02, P = .001$) contributed significantly to the regression model. Predictors of average weekly weight loss can help to tailor interventions. Positive features of the program are discussed.

Keywords: autonomous, controlling, motivation, obesity, weight loss program

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One third of the adults in the United States are overweight (body mass index [BMI] of 25–29.9), and another third are obese (BMI 30 or higher); for black women, the prevalence of obesity is over 50%.¹ Excess weight is a serious health threat because of the increased risk for comorbidities such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, respiratory problems, and other illnesses. Over 25% of deaths in black women between the ages of 40 and 85 years are associated with excess weight.²

A large proportion of overweight individuals would like to lose weight or maintain their weight loss; however, research has shown that success of long-term maintenance is low.³ Many overweight individuals are chronically engaged in some sort of weight loss program in an effort to achieve their goals while they continue the cycle of losing and regaining weight. Research has shown that motivation contributes to long-term success with weight loss.⁴ According to the self-determination theory, human behavior is impacted by various forms of motivation ranging from autonomous motivation, which is the most self-determined, to controlled motivation, which is externally driven.⁵ Although results of some studies suggest that weight loss success is associated with autonomous exercise motivation^{6,7} and autonomous motivation for continuing in a restricted-calorie weight loss program,⁸ recommendations remain for long-term

weight loss interventions that provide external support and control.⁹

Research on the influences of motivational factors on weight loss is in its infancy. The CINAHL and PubMed databases were searched for this report with combinations of subject heading terms including “exercise,” “physical fitness,” “weight loss,” “obesity,” “motivation,” and “blacks” or “African Americans.” No studies were found with black participants that assessed initial motivation and changes in motivation within programs that included on-site exercise and nutrition-focused activities. The present pilot study addresses this gap in knowledge by investigating levels of motivation and the impact of motivation on weight loss in a small group of black women who engaged in physical activity and healthy food discussions during weekly attendance at a weight loss program.

METHODS

Weight Loss Program Specifics

The weight loss program is situated in an urban family health clinic in southeastern Michigan, which has served homeless and uninsured women and children since 2008. It is funded entirely with philanthropic donations. Each week, upon their arrival, participants are weighed by clinic staff medical assistants and then proceed to the group room where they exercise to a videotape or with a guest fitness instructor guiding them. The exercise portion of the

program is followed by a lecture on healthy lifestyle. Then, the weight loss results are read aloud. Participants note their successes and pitfalls with daily diet choices and exercise in a weekly journal; however, only participants with weight loss read aloud from their journals. Small gifts such as weight loss booklets and herbal teas are given weekly to participants who reach weight loss goals.

At the final session of the 12-week program, there is a potluck dinner. Participants bring their healthy food creations with recipes to share. The individual who has lost the most weight is awarded the grand prize, which might be tickets to a play or movie or a gift basket of toiletries and a style makeover. Awards are given for second and third most weight lost.

Design

This was a descriptive correlational study. Relationships between initial and final motivation levels, initial weight, overall weight loss, average weekly weight loss, and program attendance were examined.

Participants

This study consisted of a convenience sample of black women who the medical director had already deemed medically eligible to participate in the weight loss program. Inclusion criteria included a BMI greater than 25 and age between 18 and 65 years. Individuals were enrolled in the study up to the 3rd week of the program.

Data Collection Instrument

The Treatment Self-Regulation Questionnaire (TSRQ) was used to assess levels of motivation for following a healthy diet and exercise regimen at the participant's first week of attendance. It was readministered to all participants who attended the final session at week 12. This instrument has been found to be a valid and reliable tool for assessing motivational factors associated with tobacco use, diet, and exercise.¹⁰ The TSRQ begins with the following stem: "The reason I would (exercise regularly or eat a healthy diet) is . . ." Respondents then rate a set

Table 1. Average Weekly Weight Loss

No. of Weeks Attended Program	Initial Weight (lb)	Final Weight (lb)	Difference	Average Weight Loss per Week (Difference/No. of Weeks in Program)
12	178.80	172.70	6.1	.51
12	241.00	233.60	7.4	.62
11	232.20	216.00	16.2	1.47
10	171.40	172.20	-0.8	-.08
10	202.40	202.70	-0.3	-.03
9	294.40	277.60	16.8	1.87
9	172.10	166.60	5.5	.61
8	177.70	176.70	1.0	.13
7	253.70	229.40	24.3	3.47
7	253.20	241.60	11.6	1.66
5	249.00	249.00	0.0	.00
3	179.20	176.50	2.7	.90
3	190.50	195.10	-4.6	-1.53
2	259.80	256.50	3.3	1.65
2	189.20	189.50	-0.3	-.15
2	319.30	312.30	7.00	3.50
2	257.20	258.60	-1.4	-.70

Positive numbers indicate weight loss, whereas negative numbers indicate weight gain.

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