Predicting Parental Social Control: Examination of Descriptive Norms for Sedentary and Physical Activity
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Introduction
• Parents play an important role in their child’s physical activity behaviors (Pugliese & Tinsley, 2007)
• One type of social influence that parents may use is social control (Wilson & Spink, 2010)
• Social control (SC) is a regulatory influence exerted in response to perceived violations of norms for a specific behavior (Lewis & Butterfield, 2005)
• However, the link between social control and norms has not yet been examined
  • Descriptive norms (what others usually do) may be salient given the link with various behaviors (Rivas & Sheeran, 2003) including physical activity (Priebe & Spink, 2011)
  • Descriptive norms for both active and sedentary behaviors may play a role as parents use both inactivity and ‘screen time’ as cues to exert social control (Wilson, Spink, & Brawley, 2010)

Purpose
Given the importance of norms in the definition of social control, this study examined how family physical activity and sedentary descriptive norms influenced SC use

Methods
Participants:
• 60 parents (41 mothers, 7 fathers, 12 not reported) recruited from various children’s centers, outdoors events and schools
• Children (53.3% female) ranging in age from 2 to 18 years (mean age = 6.4 years, SD = 4.6)

Measures:
• Participants completed an online survey assessing:
  • Descriptive Norms – single item measure (Nolan, 2008; Priebe & Spink, 2011); (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly disagree)
  • Family Physical Activity Norm (PA Norm)
    • “Members of this family regularly participate in physical activity”
  • Family Sedentary Activity Norm (Sed Norm)
    • “Members of this family spend a lot of time watching television, using the computer or playing video games”
  • Parental Social Control - 9 items (Wilson, Spink & Priebe, 2010)
    (1=not at all; 7=very often)

When you wanted your child to do more physical activity, how often did you do the following…
• Positive (4 items): “Say to your child that physical activity is good for him/her”
• Collaborative (3 items): “Offer to be active with your child”
• Negative (2 items): “Order your child to be active”

Results
Mean (SD) Range
PA Norm 5.3 (1.7) 1-7
Sed Norm 4.4 (1.8) 1-7

Analysis
• Separate multiple regression for each type of SC:
  • DV: Each type of social control
  • IV: PA Norm and Sedentary Norm

Discussion
• Parents’ perceptions of family descriptive norms for activity and sedentary behaviors were related to SC exerted
  • PA Norm positively related to positive and collaborative SC
  • Extends previous research that linked parent activity to positive and collaborative SC (Wilson & Spink, 2011)
  • Sed Norm negatively linked to collaborative SC and approached significance for negative SC
  • Reinforces idea that sedentary behaviors may play a role in parents’ use of SC (Wilson, Spink, & Brawley, 2010)
  • Supports the conceptualization of social control being closely tied to perceptions of norms (Lewis & Butterfield, 2005)

Strengths
• Examined norms for both physical activity and sedentary behavior
• Guided by conceptual definition of social control

Limitations
• Violation of the norms was not assessed
• Mostly mothers participated limits ability to generalize to fathers

Future Directions
• Examine how social control changes when these norms are violated
• Consider both the sedentary and physical activity behaviors of children when examining parental influences