

Predicting Parental Social Control: Examination of Descriptive Norms for Sedentary and Physical Activity

Melissa M. Nelson and Kathleen S. Wilson
California State University, Fullerton

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”

Analysis

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

Results

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

Positive Social Control

Predictors	R ²	β	F
PA Norm	10%	0.26**	3.13**
Sed Norm		-0.15	

Collaborative Social Control

Predictors	R ²	β	F
PA Norm	24%	0.29**	8.99*
Sed Norm		-0.37*	

Negative Social Control

Predictors	R ²	β	F
PA Norm	10%	0.19	3.29***
Sed Norm		-0.25***	

*p-value ≤ 0.01; **p-value ≤ 0.05; ***p-value ≤ 0.09

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



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