

Conclusions and Recommendations

The effectiveness of prevention approaches addressing misperceived social norms have been validated in numerous research studies and in campus and school interventions since they were first proposed by H. Wesley Perkins and myself in 1986. Programs designed to reduce alcohol and tobacco use have been implemented successfully at all levels of prevention using a variety of media and presentation techniques. Despite these successes there are a number of challenges facing the prevention field at present as we continue to develop new and improved social norms interventions. These include the following:

- how to meaningfully integrate universal, selective, and indicated social norms interventions in a synergistic, mutually reinforcing manner;
- how to effectively combine social norms interventions at all three levels of prevention with other strategies such as policy enforcement and other environmental strategies;
- to determine whether tailored social norms interventions based on gender, ethnicity and other group identities are appropriate and effective;
- to evaluate the relative salience of different normative targets for different populations, such as attitudinal and behavioral norms;
- to utilize our knowledge about successful social norms interventions to address other problems such as sexual assault, social justice issues, eating behaviors, academic climate, prejudicial behavior, and issues of spirituality, and adapt the model accordingly;
- to develop standardized evaluation criteria to ensure that social norms interventions are evaluated appropriately and thoroughly;
- to learn from unsuccessful interventions to develop an inventory of common mistakes, problems, and implementation failures; and
- to develop a set of conditions and criteria for successful implementation.

The social norms approach provides an excellent example of how theory- and research-driven interventions can be designed, implemented and evaluated to successfully address health problems. The model

incorporates recent understandings about the important role of the environment in prevention, the nature and impact of peer influence, the need for interventions that are tailored to their audience, and the design of comprehensive environments that can foster change. We look forward to new successes and innovative applications of this approach in the years to come.

Note: Please contact the author if you have information about a social norms intervention or study that you would like to see included in a future revision of this paper.

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