

Types of Norms

There are different types of norms. One kind of norm refers to attitudes or what people feel is right based on morals or beliefs (*injunctive norms*). A second type of norm is concerned with behavior, i.e. what people actually do (*descriptive norms*). Borsari and Carey's 2003 meta-analysis of 23 studies of norms misperceptions (described as "self-other differences") found that misperceptions for injunctive norms were greater than misperceptions for behavioral norms. They also found that injunctive norms were more likely than descriptive norms to predict drinking behavior and negative consequences of drinking. Trockel, Williams and Reis (2003) reached a similar conclusion in an investigation of injunctive and descriptive drinking norms in fraternities, as did Larimer and Neighbors (2003) in a study of misperceptions of gambling norms. While both injunctive and descriptive norms are widely surveyed in social norms efforts, most successful interventions have used descriptive norms. Thus, it is not clear from existing research if one of these norm types would be more likely to change behavior than the other and should therefore be preferred in social norms interventions. Perkins (2003b) has pointed out that even when behavioral norms are permissive, feedback about injunctive norms can be effectively used in social norms interventions because they are usually more conservative than actual behavior.