

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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REFORMULATED COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL TREATMENT FOR OBESITY: A
RANDOMIZED PILOT STUDY INVESTIGATING CHANGES IN EXPECTATIONS
FOR TREATMENT OUTCOME

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Poor maintenance of treatment induced weight loss following behavioral treatment poses a significant problem in the long-term management of obesity. The maintenance problem may stem in part from the failure of standard behavioral treatment to address certain psychological factors, specifically, unrealistic weight-loss and appearance-related expectations for treatment outcome. Accordingly, this study tested the effectiveness of a reformulated cognitive behavioral weight-loss intervention (RCB) designed to address unrealistic expectations about treatment outcome and appearance-related motivation for weight loss compared to a standard behavioral weight-loss intervention (SB) in women ages 18-30 years. The study was conducted in three phases. Phase I included 10 group weight-loss sessions, which were identical for both conditions. Phase II included 10 additional sessions of either RCB treatment or SB treatment. Phase III was a 6-month follow-up period. Primary outcomes collected at the end of Phase II and Phase III were changes from baseline in expectations and appearance-related motivation for weight loss.

Secondary outcomes included changes in weight, body image, social physique anxiety, and self-esteem. Twenty-eight participants started Phase II and 26 were present at the conclusion of Phase III. Significant time X treatment interaction effects were observed for expectations for reaching “dream” body weight ($p = .02$), “disappointed” body weight ($p = .03$), motivation to lose weight to improve self-confidence ($p = .05$), and self-esteem ($p = .05$) at the end of Phase II. For all interaction effects, the RCB condition improved significantly compared to the SB condition. Equivalent weight losses were observed in the SB (6.2 kg) and RCB (5.5 kg) conditions ($p = .51$) at the end of Phase II. At the end of Phase III, SB participants regained 37% of lost weight (2.3 kg), while RCB participants regained 27% of lost weight (1.5 kg; $p = .44$). Thus, the RCB treatment was effective in changing unrealistic expectations and appearance-related motivation for weight loss compared to the SB treatment, but it did not produce significantly better maintenance of lost weight. Future studies with larger samples and longer follow-up periods are needed to determine whether changes in expectations and motivation for weight loss lead to improved long-term maintenance of lost weight.