

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE WITH WEIGHT LOSS:

A PERSONAL AND SOCIAL MODEL OF ACTION AND REACTION

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Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the role of family and friends in women's successful weight loss experience. The specific aims were to: (1) describe the factors that precipitated the initiation of their most recent dieting experience; (2) identify how this experience differed from previous weight loss attempts; (3) determine the various roles of family and friends throughout the weight loss experience; and (4) explore how the behaviors of others either facilitated or impeded the women's progress in their weight loss experience. **Methods:** Ten women, ages 32 to 54 years, who had a reduction in body mass index between 16% and 44%, were interviewed. Content analysis using side by side analyses was conducted. **Results:** A model of the trajectory of a successful weight loss experience was developed. It included factors associated with dieting in both the personal and social contexts. Weight loss was described as a personal journey but not in isolation of their social environment. Five phases were identified in the model: Preparing for Weight loss (Strategizing and Readyng), Acting, Achieving a Milestone, Consolidating: Dieting to Goal, and Transitioning to a Healthier Lifestyle. Embedded within each phase are specific actions and reactions of the women and their family and friends associated with facilitating success or impeding the process. **Implications:** These findings provide clinicians with a model to guide discussions on weight loss issues. An appreciation for the social context of eating is emphasized throughout the dieting experience. Health providers are encouraged to assist women in identifying behaviors that would be helpful from others and recognize how their dieting may be impacting their family. As permanent lifestyle changes are made women need to understand how potential resistive behaviors from family members may impede their weight loss goals and how these behaviors can be effectively negotiated.