

Longitudinal Relationships Between Newlywed Communication and BMI

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Background

Though providers often recommend couples seek support from their spouse in making health behavior changes, the interaction between partner influences and goal maintenance depends on a variety of factors (1). Weight reduction is a common goal for newlyweds, as weight gain is typical in the first years of marriage and is associated with a variety of negative health outcomes (2). The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between establishing goals through topic selection between partners and subsequent efficacy in weight loss.

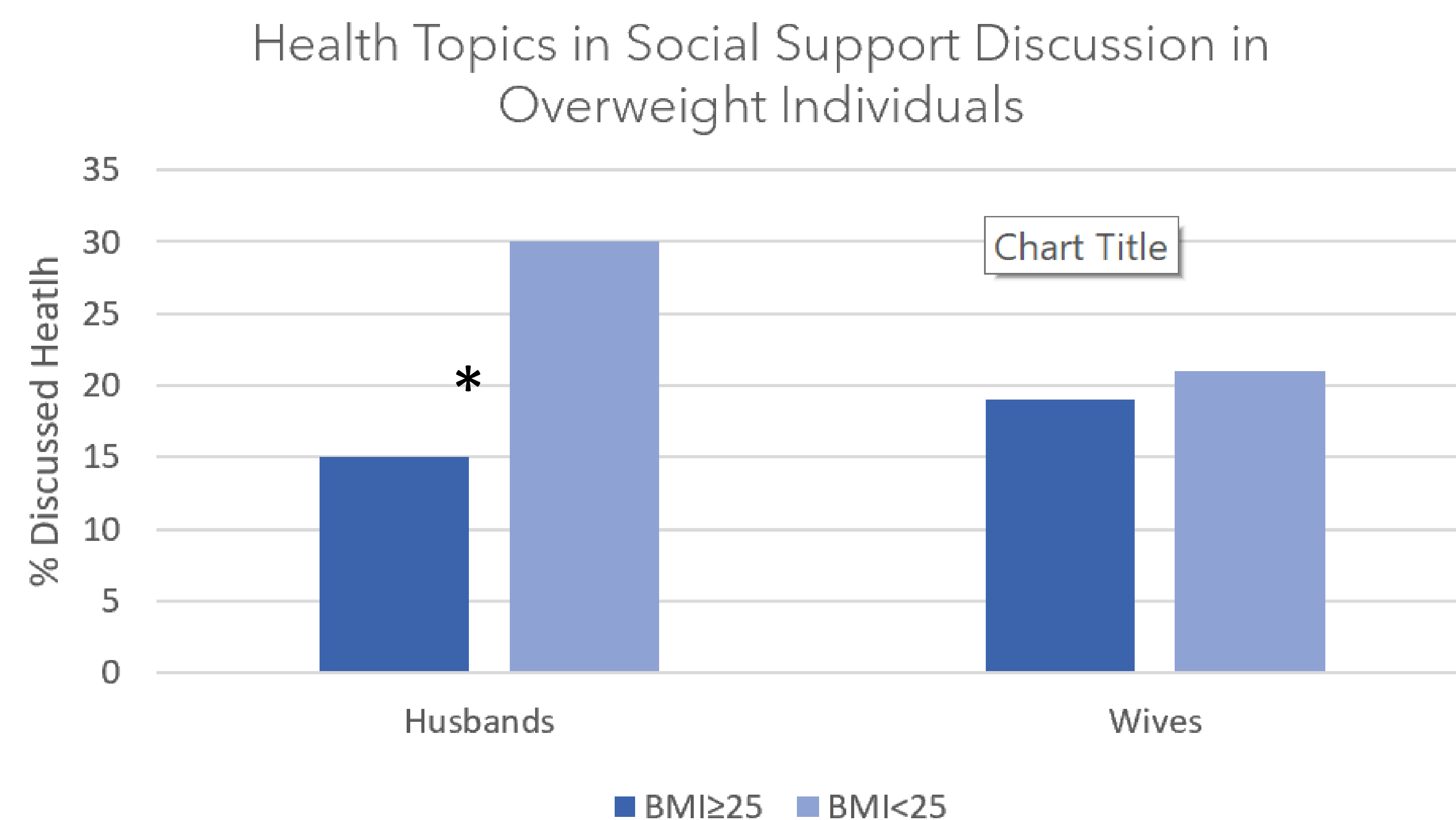
Research Questions

- 1) Are overweight spouses more likely to choose to talk about health with their spouse than normal weight spouses?
- 2) Do overweight individuals who discuss health with their spouse experience greater reductions in BMI than those who don't discuss health?

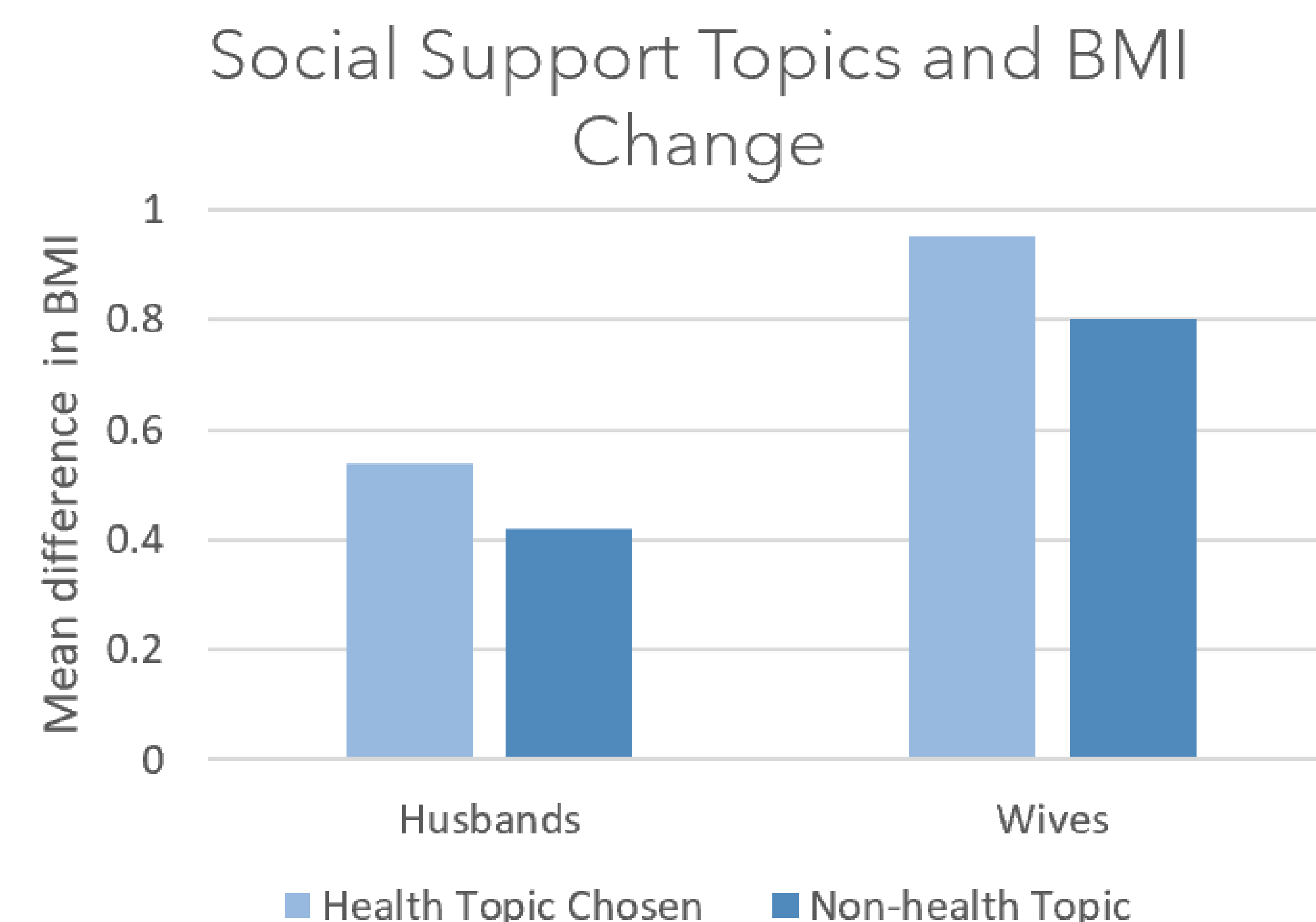
Methods and Materials

- Newlywed couples engaged in videotaped conversations within a few months of marriage (T1). Each partner was asked to "choose something about yourself you would like to change." Topics were coded into "health" (e.g., exercise, weight issues, physical health issues, and diet/eating habits) and "non-health" categories.
- Height and weight measurements (which were used to calculate BMI) were assessed at T1 and 9 months later (T2).

	Overweight at T1	Health Topic Discussed	Mean BMI Change
Husband	27%	26%	+ 0.45 $\sigma=1.92$
Wife	45%	20%	+ 0.71 $\sigma=2.40$



Percentage of individuals who discussed health topics by spouse and BMI.



Mean BMI point changes by spouse and topic of conversation

Results

- Overweight husbands were significantly less likely to discuss health topics with their spouse than normal weight husbands ($\chi^2(1) = 9.44, p = .002$). Overweight wives were equally likely to discuss health topics with their spouse as normal weight wives ($\chi^2(1) = 0.19, p = .662$).
- For overweight husbands and wives, there was no significant difference in BMI change based on whether they discussed a health topic with their spouse (husbands: $t = -.37, p = .715$; wives: $t = -.40, p = .693$).

Discussion

- These results suggest that partner influence of BMI outcome occurs beyond discrete social support conversations (1). Simply identifying and discussing health topics with a spouse does not appear to predict or influence outcome. There are likely other prolonged and consistent communication factors that influence health behaviors or intervention efficacy that should be the subject of further research.

Acknowledgments

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References

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