

Why Weight Watchers succeeds: Meetings provide a blend of spirituality and therapy

August 24 2009

Weight Watchers is the world's largest support group, with more than 1.5 million members worldwide. What makes overweight consumers turn to this organization for help? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says dieters are attracted to its combination of spirituality and therapy.

Authors Risto Moisio (California State University, Long Beach) and Mariam Beruchashvili (California State University, Northridge) undertook observations of weekly Weight Watchers meetings and conducted interviews with female members and group leaders. They conclude that Weight Watchers provides a powerful service to its clientele.

"Even if Weight Watchers' advertisements make it sound as if it were only about [weight loss](#), the social function of weekly meetings extends far beyond the tricks of the weight loss trade," write the authors.

Interviewing members and observing meetings taught the researchers that Weight Watchers aids dieters' pursuit of well-being in a world that fails to understand them. "Pursuing weight loss is an immensely daunting project fraught with many troubles, whether psychological, social, or physical. To overcome these challenges, consumers turn to Weight Watchers."

Members of Weight Watchers seek to alleviate many psychological traumas they link to their struggles with weight, the authors found. "As

consumers evolve into full-fledged Weight Watchers members, the support group becomes their spiritual and therapeutic companion," the authors write.

For many members, weekly meetings are crucial for their well-being. "The presence of fellow Weight Watchers is equally therapeutic as it is spiritual: it transforms the support group into a greater, spiritual power that engenders therapeutic aid to members struggling with their diets," the authors write. "The support group gives meaning to members' at times trauma-ridden overweight condition, grants forgiveness for members' weight loss failures, offers valued oversight and overarching guidance needed to make it through the trials and tribulations of the week, as well as casting the occasional weight-loss successes in a veneer of much-needed glamour," the authors conclude.

More information: Risto Moisio and Mariam Beruchashvili. "Questing for Well-Being at Weight Watchers: The Role of Spiritual-Therapeutic Model in a Support Group." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): February 2010 (published online July 23, 2009).

Source: University of Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Why Weight Watchers succeeds: Meetings provide a blend of spirituality and therapy (2009, August 24) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-weight-watchers-blend-spirituality-therapy.html>

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